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Women Writing War and Peace in Post Vietnam Era

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Amy Driscoll

Faculty Mentors: Barbara Guetti

On a cool evening in May 1991, I sat on my front porch and contemplated my status as a wife running in a parallel universe to my husband. My husband was at the time, an enlisted sailor serving the U.S. Navy aboard a nuclear powered submarine operating off the coast of our homeport of Groton, Connecticut. My husband and I had been married just over a year. It had become apparent to me after a short time that the phrase “If the navy wanted the sailor to have a wife, we would have issued him one in his sea bag,” was indeed not just a funny statement but in fact seemed to be the way life was expected to operate. I was an extra, an afterthought, someone not considered in the planning and strategy of my husband’s existence as a sailor. It was this experience of knowing that the military did not consider me necessary to my husband’s life and his happiness, which has fueled my scholarship for this project. I know what it is like to have lived next to the military machine and to have been ignored. My voice as woman, as a wife and as a partner, was not valued, heard, or acknowledged, but what about the voices of other women? Where are the voices of the wives whose husbands return from Lebanon injured or the partners of soldiers who never came home from the first Gulf War? The question for me on this project became how to acknowledge women’s voices about their lives in the shadows of the military. I wanted to explore the stories of active duty women and their first combat service in the Gulf War. I wanted to find the stories of wives and mothers who wait, worry, and survive by their own devices. I wanted to chronicle and describe the stories of these remarkable women, to find a place for women to write war and have it participate in the shaping of the contextual view of American culture.

It is important for women to participate in this cacophony of topics that surround the American military experience; impossible to describe exactly how they should do it: what is or is not acceptable for women to write about, what ways of writing are allowed or banned. My research on the topic of women writing about war led me in two unexpected directions: first, the sheer amount and variety of material I found about women writing about war—in the twentieth century alone—

was astonishingly abundant and various: so much so that I found it difficult, and feel it would be premature at this stage, to classify what I discovered, or even less, to make prescriptions or judgments about what women's war-writing generically is, or ought to be, like. On the other hand, the trail gave out just at the point where my own personal experience of living next to war began, in our contemporary period which has been designated in several ways: post-Cold War; postcolonial, postmodern, post-feminist, global, multinational, and of course as usual, apocalyptic. The conditions of war specific to this period are still in the process of being named. But, just as American women's direct participation in these conditions —as military wives, or as active-duty soldiers—has increased with unprecedented rapidity, their silence about war, and about their part in it, is striking, and for me, deeply disturbing.

Women who are now living and acting within the contemporary conditions of war need to participate in the crucial process of naming it, and we as a society and culture need to have them do it. As I make this effort myself, I wonder where the other women have gone. The absence of women's voices in this most recent moment ruptures the continuity of the historical timeframe I seek to establish in the body of this paper. I cannot accept this contemporary silence as normal or inevitable. I cannot even accept it as silence: I feel impelled to interpret it, read meanings and implications into it, or yell into the void myself, even if it only gives back echoes.

When women give up the right to write about war in its multiple manifestations, or topics, it is the implication that this is all somehow distasteful, dirty and disagreeable that bothers me the most. The lack of any call for change, the lack of any cry of outrage, the missing first-hand published accounts, expressions of pain and suffering that allow others to contemplate what is not brought to them by their television screens also bother me. When women who are in the very midst of war do not seem to connect to it, will not talk to one another or to the rest of us about it, this pathological silence engenders equally pathological delusions of safety and security in Americans who do not know what the body looks like when the flesh is gone. I am troubled by the blank look on the faces of millions of patriotic American women who have been told they must support the troops to make them feel better about what it is they choose to do, if such silent choice is not in fact

surrendering to coercion. Women's real or assumed lack of passion about sending their sons and their daughters off to other people's lands, as obtrusive invaders or as displaced innocents horrifies me.

I hear myself speaking into the silence. Get Angry. Get Mad. Get frustrated at the lack of real information. Get loud. Get Raucous. Demand peace. Demand war. Demand that we fight. Demand that we speak. Demand that they listen. Demand they come home. Demand that no one else die for oil, power, lust, or greed. Demand that your voice be the one that writes the truth, and that the truth is published. Demand that the military let you fight next to the man who thinks you need protecting. Demand that your instinct to kill is as non-gendered as his is. Demand that no one touch your body without your permission and that if they do you will tell, you will yell and you will scream. Demand that your sexuality have nothing to do with your job performance. Demand that your job performance not be tied to how many children you have or how well you care for them. Demand that your ability and merit be the reasons you do or do not get, and keep a job. Scream that your voice is valid and necessary. Write, write and don't stop writing; let your words be your anthem; let your words be your patriotic duty to yourself, your children, your spouse, your military, your citizens, your country or anyone's country.

History, for the most part, has gendered war as male; as a male domain, a bastion that simply cannot be contemplated as concerning or affecting women. Women are seen as the victims standing silently by on the sidelines while their men write the stories of the horrors they have seen, the pain they have suffered, the damaging effects on their psyches. The images of war they offer us are of men battling, fighting, clashing, taking revenge and seeking recompense for wrongs thought and perceived. These stories imply that we, as women, have no real place in the clashes, no real vantage point from which to contemplate our own or their situation. We have no grounds in commenting because we cannot possibly comprehend what war looks like or how it feels to commit violence

against a fellow man and that man's wife, daughters and sons. What they forget is that we are always there, always standing behind them, next to them and in some cases in their stead.

Women have never been in the background when it comes to war; we have been trying to tell our stories for thousands of years. We want the world to know we ache when we lose our sons, we cry when our homes are gone and we get angry when our rights and our lives are stepped on and shoved to the background. Men's stories of war only represent a minority of the populations affected by war. Education, class and most importantly money, often privilege the men who write stories about war. These three things give them access to the ability to write, the time in which to write, and the innate sense that what they have to say is somehow more valued than those who "experience" war at their hands or while standing next to them.

Women have been interacting with military communities since war began, whether in support roles, clean-up roles or, lately in combat roles. Women have been the brutalized citizens left to starve, after armies have leveled their villages and killed their children. Women have been the observers and the participants; they have been the caregivers and the ones firing the guns. Women have never sat on the sidelines and not participated in war; women have never been left out. More often it is that their stories do not have the same value or the same qualities that those who control the strings of what we read, want them to have. Whatever specific qualities women's voices may have, these are the voices pushed to the back, left in the dust and forgotten over time, because history and the stories of its participants are written by winners and women are never ever winners when it comes to war. Women might have something to say about the dubiousness of victory, the hollowness of winning, beyond the kind of resigned irony that still perpetuates the same familiar military heroics that have lasted from Homer to Hemingway.

Women came to writing in World War I from many places that had been undiscovered to them previously. They began to write stories, letters, fictions, poetry, and history. They wrote

personal accounts, and they filled in gaps with the workings of their imaginations for what they could not see, hear or feel. Some told each other it was wrong; some told each other it was right, but what they did for most women was to encourage them that their voices were worthy. Upper and middle class women came face to face with the horrors of men wounded and scarred through their work as VAD's (Voluntary Aid Detachment), or as FANY (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry), as ambulance drivers, support systems for clinics, and front line removal of injured and wounded soldiers. Working Class women left the home service finding work in munitions factories and wartime industrial shops. Women signed up for WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) where they saw to the army's domestic responsibilities. Women took over their husband's shops, businesses, and public service jobs when their husbands enlisted. Women's lives changed in drastic and prodigious ways and most importantly, they wrote about their experiences. Their interactions with the military, the industry surrounding the military, or the home front provided them with ways and means to begin expressing their interactions and creating valuable cathartic material. Writing provided for all these women a way to deal with emotions that were new, overwhelming, not just for themselves but for society as well.

Professional women writers took over war as a subject in the months leading up to the violence. They provided social and political perspectives that spanned the range from propaganda for the English government by Mrs. Humphry Ward to the pacifist writings of E. Sylvia Pankhurst (Smith, 6). However, it was also an opportunity for women who had never written professionally to find their voices valued and publishable as well. The war had opened up professions by the thousands for women. Writing, while not always a profession, was an avenue for many women to explore their place in society. There were many kinds and types of writing by women that were the result of interactions with the military and the effects of the war on society. Just as experience in

wartime is not limited to one class or one gender, neither were women's writings about World War I.

Women do not own one experience of war. Men find comradeship and understanding in the shared experience of war. When a man writes of trenches and death, other men can imagine and feel the shared experience of battle. Women have no shared experience with the men who write war, so they must write what their experiences are and those are often what society finds value in.

Claire Tylee states:

Women's literary responses to war, however, tend to be much wider and more subtle in scope than battle-tales, since they are interested in the social context of belligerence and its connection with personal relations and the quality of ordinary life. Women have always been sufferers in wartime, their peacetime way of life inevitably disrupted as they become nurses, widows, refugees, slaves. (13)

It is the suffering and the disruption that become the shared experience for women, and while not all stories are stories of suffering or ones that dwell within the suffering, all stories of war that women write represent a way of aching for the lost.

One of the women who wrote World War I was Mary Borden, an American woman who used her own money to set up a hospital on the French lines, where she worked as a nurse for the duration of the war (Smith, 327). In her book *The Forbidden Zone* published in 1929, she invites the reader to travel with her on her journey. It is a journey of horror and devastation. It is empty of life, or any of the qualities of life that exist outside of the scope of death and destruction. By inviting the reader to take the journey, she can recount what she sees without emotion, and as if pointing out the scenery on a travelogue, she can bring the reader along as a visitor to the horror. In her essay *Belgium*, she begins the travel log of war and in the process explains the toll wrought on Belgium:

Cities? None. Towns? No whole ones. Yes, there are half a dozen villages. But there is plenty of mud – mud with things lying in it, wheels, broken motors, parts of houses, graves. This is what is left of Belgium, Come, I'll Show you. (Smith 32)

In her essay entitled *Conspiracy in The Forbidden Zone*, she laments the toil of caring for the wounded soldiers just to see them eaten up again by the war machine. The reader is made to feel the despondency and pain, carefully compartmentalized and put away in a safe place. We know that her grief and utter disgust are there just lying under the surface of her words and yet we know that she has yet to fully realize her own significant pain. Her words allow the reader to share her frustration and yearn for an end to her pain.

It is all carefully arranged. Everything is arranged. It is arranged that men should be broken and that they should be mended. Just as you send your clothes to the laundry and mend them when they come back, so we send our men to the trenches and mend them when they come back again. You send your socks and your shirts again and again to the laundry, and you sew up the tears and clip the raveled edges again and again just as many times as they will stand it. And then you throw them away. And we send our men to the war again and again, just as long as they will stand it; just until they are dead, and then we throw them into the ground. (Smith 260)

We know her passion for caring for the wounded led her to the front to set up a hospital, but her passion for sharing her experience through writing has left us an account that 75 years later still rings true. The use of the language of the domestic front or the home allows us to see that what she seeks in tidiness is a return to civility and humanity. She is creating emotion by juxtaposing laundry with soldiers. We know they are more than that. We know their lives have more value than the socks we mend and by posing them as soldiers; we are left to ache for their uselessness and their nameless faceless bodies. We ask of our citizens/soldiers in war to be washed and mended; we just use them up until they are dead and then they are of use no longer.

Cecily Hamilton was a former actress whose vast experiences as an administrator in a French military hospital led her to become a writer of three war novels shortly after World War I (Smith, 328). *William an Englishman*, written in 1919, is a novel that tells the story of William Tully and his feminist wife Griselda, caught in Belgium at the outset of the war. Their experiences of war as civilians trapped in the uptake of events they have no chance to escape, highlights the moral dilemma of pacifist sentiments and war experienced on a personal level (Smith, 14).

If they had taken her away, she might be...anywhere! East or west, gone in any direction, and leaving no clue for her following. Anywhere in a blind incomprehensible world, where men killed men and might was right, and life, as he knew it from his childhood up, had ended in an orgy of devilry! (Smith 54)

These words written by a woman author are a man speaking about his fear that his wife has been taken away by soldiers. The words, however, are not gendered; they are not written with exclusivity of a male empathy. They are words that anyone searching for a loved one, today or yesterday, in a war environment would scream: “my life the one I knew, the one I loved, is gone.”

Later when William finds Griselda, his anguish at discovering her rape and her soul wrenching pain bring into focus--that war is often the opportunity for individuals to inflict horror on one another without purpose or meaning.

For a moment he fought with the certainty, and then it came down on him like a storm: for once in his life imagination was vivid, and he saw with the eyes of his mind as clearly as with the eyes of his body. All the details, the animal details, her cries and her pitiful wrestlings; and the phrase ‘licentious soldiery’ personified in the face of the man who had been Griselda’s gaoler. (Smith 55)

Hamilton’s ability to write about a woman’s sexual victimization at the hands of men from a man’s perspective allows her to explore rape as a tool of war. The violation is just one in a long line of torturous events. It is the last stripping away of humanity for the woman at the center and for the man in her world. He is now as powerless and as wounded as if he himself had been the one raped and left in a heap. The rapist/soldier has now destroyed two psyches, and victimized her entire family. The power of rape as a tool of war is one that is often not about sex or needs ungratified, but it is a tool of obliteration of will. We as readers know that William’s suffering is only a part of what Griselda must feel, but we recognize that his anguish is different from hers. Hers, while both physical and mental may in time heal because as a woman she lives her life knowing that a man or any man can hold that power over her. William’s grief will gnaw at his identity and his kinship with his fellow man. He knows that as a man, he can wield that power over other women and he knows the terror that can bring. Now he has experienced the powerlessness to protect the one he loves

from the horror and his inability to be able to make it better. He cannot seek out her torturer; her rapist is a nameless, faceless entity that is embodied in every soldier. He either shrinks in shame or picks up a weapon and fight, thereby further destroying Griselda by turning against her pacifist beliefs. He is as emasculated as if he himself had been penetrated. Hamilton's brilliant turn allows the reader to find that war has victims whose suffering is not gendered or sexualized but ugly and obliterating.

Helen Zenna Smith (Evadne Price) an English actress who became a journalist and popular children's writer in the 1920's, published *Not So Quiet...Stepdaughters of War*' in 1932. This was her response to Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1929, her answer to the never asked question of where were the women during the war. She wanted the world to know that war was cruel and traumatic for women as well. War was not just a felt experience; it was an owned experience for the women who worked the ambulances and hospitals of the front lines (Smith 68). Women have dreams, nightmares and horrors just as the men do.

He is clean and young and straight and far removed from the shadow procession I watch night after night, the procession that came to me early this morning and wakened me shrieking in the presence of a compartment full of shocked strangers. He is so gay, so full of life, this boy who is holding me closely in his arms... he could never join that ghostly parade... (Smith 141)

Price's strategy is to find a place for women to identify with men as equals. She wants women to feel and to act entitled to feelings of power. Because her character has experienced war and its horrors at the front, she is also entitled to have sexual feelings and needs similar to those of a man who is taking leave from the front. This woman is as pained and as needy as the soldier she holds. Her experience entitles her to the same relief and gratification. Price allows the reader to indulge and some may say excuse her character from the societal ramifications of her sexual behavior. She is not bad, or dirty, or a whore, she is simply acting in a way that we excuse and allow men to do. Her

character is using the identification of shared experience to become one of entitlement and freedom for her choices outside of the front-line experience.

There were also women who were publishing in an effort to stop the war, some like Catherine Marshall who felt unable to support the war at any level. She set up the International Women's Committee for the Permanent Peace and was active in the organization and running of the No Conscription Fellowship to provide help to conscientious objectors to avoid military service (Smith, 64). In her efforts to wage an active campaign against the war, she published *Women and War*, an essay included as part of the peace campaign in 1915.

Let us look steadfastly at war and the consequences of war, with our women's eyes—our mother's eyes—and tell the world what we see. Let us look honestly and courageously...shirking none of the pain and the horror, refusing to be blinded by glamour. (There is no glamour about wrecked homes of Belgium...) We must not shut our eyes to any of the wickedness of it; we must let the pity and the shame of it enter deep into our hearts and rouse a passionate determination that these things shall never be again. (Smith 112)

Different from Price's identification of women with men, Marshall seeks to find a separate space from men. She wants her readers to identify as "other," as women who could not find a shared experience of serving the war or its machine. Marshall feels the separateness of being an innate female was the need never to have war, never to identify with the battlefield. Rather it is to identify in a peaceful way: to find action through the shared experience of motherhood. As a mother, one is entitled to use one's voice to speak against the slaughter. It as if in finding a voice for peace she can no longer find a space for women to be in service. Women who bravely work the front lines do not find glamour in their actions, but they do find value in using their experience to comment on their entitlement to be there. Marshall's call for peace does not allow that space to exist, because for her, women and war only exist on one plane—that of horrified observer, not of brave participant.

Ongoing scholarship in the study of women's war writing allows us to read "non-literary" or "private" kinds of writing that would not have been deemed worthy of publication at the time they

were produced. Angela Smith's anthology includes letters, diaries and memoirs that give us insight and understanding about the vast and varied experiences of World War I. Mary Ann Brown's diary of her time spent as a nurse serving in Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Reserve, gives a chilling account of women who were not supposed to be on the front lines and her proximity to the shelling during the evacuation of Gallipoli:

We were hard at it all day, had no time to pay attention to the fighting. The whole thing is too ghastly to write about...We had 640 bad cases on at midnight and we had to send away three boat loads that we had no room for...As I am writing this the shells are going whistling over our heads, they don't worry me, the noise of the guns so close worries me more. (Smith 257)

The letters of Emily Chitticks, also unpublished previously, are some of the only letters available that give us insight into the personal writing of a working-class woman. Smith suggests that while many working class women were literate by that time, perhaps because of the severe demands on their time, their ability to write was compromised. Emily's letters to her fiancé Will Martin are a touching and painful account of their separation due to the war. Her letters written to Will after his death were returned to her and the haunting ache present in her words attest to the loss women felt that has no bearing on class, society or position:

March 1917... Do you mean Will you have been fighting. Don't keep it from me dear if you have been in the trenches. Tell me, I would rather know. (Smith 131)

March 1917... My heart seems ready to burst with longing for you dear. What ever shall I do when you have to go right away. I really don't know. It will break my heart really Will. (Smith 131)

March 25 1917... Oh my dear boy I do pray that you will be spared, if I lost you well dear I don't know what I should do. I do hope I shall hear from you soon (Smith 131). From a returned letter Emily had sent to Will that reached him after his death on Tuesday March 27 on the front line. Emily never married. (Smith 132)

What is important to remember about the women writing World War I is that they were seeking to break out of authority structures and find a space for their voices to be heard as writers and commentators on their world. They were using writing as a medium that whether published or

unpublished sought a way to tell their story. Writing was for these women a means of self-identification that found its value in the act of expression, regardless of publication. Their ability to see themselves as people who had something to say—something that others could read and needed to hear—justifies including these women’s voices in the stories we tell of war.

In her book *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness*, Claire Tylee suggests that war is a state of hostility that takes place between human beings, and life is a place where such hostility exists. Excluding women as a group from writing about war makes it easier to allow hostility to be taken for granted and actively promoted. Women as a group would have to know and experience war. Women as a group are therefore entitled to write war and its consequences.

The idea that war is conceived or thought of as being an entirely masculine or male experience is one that by World War II had still not been shaken off. World War II was fought with the biggest armies the world had ever seen. Civilian deaths in the war surpassed military losses by the millions, in part due to technological advances that led to war being better organized and more targeted than ever before. Mass extermination by either Nazi death camps or American bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had no gender-particular experience. Destruction took place on a scale that we like to think of today as incomprehensible. It is only in our imagination that we think destruction and genocide on a massive scale will never happen again. It is happening today in places like Rwanda and the Sudan. Women writing World War II have completely new things to say, but in our hearts, we know they are saying the same things women who write about war have always said; “this is our own atrocious doing.”

As varied, diverse and complex pieces, the writings of women of World War II give us additional insight into the lives of women in war. Their actions, their thoughts, their hopes and dreams, their fears and pain are the human experience, not a male or female experience. Their writing styles, whether memoirs, poetry, fiction, first-hand accounts or journalism, give us insight

and understanding that cannot be found in the direct male experience of war on the front lines. The portrayal of suffering by survivors is a testament to those who perished unknown and forgotten.

Charlotte Delbo was a French woman involved in the Resistance, who was sent to Auschwitz in 1943 for producing anti-German leaflets. She is the author of numerous plays and essays as well as the *Auschwitz and After* trilogy: *None of Us Will Return* (1965), *Useless Knowledge* (1970) and *The Measure of Our Days* (1970) (Sheldon 355).

Her account of senseless horror in *Weiter* from *Auschwitz and After* is a plain, poignant account of life where you do not understand the rules and the rules do not apply to anyone but you. She gives the account of the killing of a woman in a work party of Polish women who assemble everyday to break rocks, pave roads, excavate sand, dig ditches and carry bricks. They begin their noon break; they down their soup. A guard shouts “Weiter” (“No Further”) to a woman walking towards a stream with her tin cup in her hand. The woman stops, he continues to shout, she hesitates, he shouts again.

Standing with the marsh behind her, everything about her questions: “Is it allowed here?” “Weiter,” shrieks the SS. Then the woman begins to walk, upstream. “Weiter.” A shot. The woman crumples. The SS swings his gun back over his shoulder, calls his dog, walks toward the woman. Leaning over the body, he turns her over as one does game. The other SS laugh from their posts. She had gone beyond the limit by less than twenty steps. (Sheldon 223)

Delbo relates an experience particular in its horror, not particular in its gender or its victim. It is her ability to write this experience that gives us insight and grace to attempt to understand one face of war generations afterward.

Another survivor experience is Sara Nomberg-Przytyk’s. Sara was a Hasidic Jew who fled to Eastern Poland after the German invasion and was deported in 1943 to the Stutthof concentration camp and then on to Auschwitz. She worked as a journalist in Poland after the war and wrote *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land* (Sheldon 357). Her story of the unthinkable numbness that overtakes one when death becomes ever present is humbling:

One evening, as I was returning from the infirmary to the barracks for the night, I bumped into a group of girls from the Leichenkommando, whose job it was to load the dead into trucks. One of them stood near a pile of corpses, the second near the truck, the third on a small stool, and the fourth on the platform of the truck. They were handing the dead to each other any old way: grabbing the corpse by the leg, or the arm, or the hair and then swinging it onto the platform. I noted their indifference to the dead and tried to imagine what kind of women they had been a few years ago, when they loved and were loved in a world of normality. Every few minutes I could hear a sound—the thump of falling flesh and the cries of the women: “Hurry up, Why are you dawdling?” (Sheldon 220)

It is her ability to imagine the humanity they once had in a time of great normality that allows us to understand her horror. Nomberg-Przytyk doesn't just give us an account of these women in their present condition but she allows us to imagine with her that humanity would be found again, that these women who hurry the dumping of the corpses may one day hurry their grandchildren down the steps into a garden or hold their loved ones close again in the future.

It is important to think about the ways in which the survivors' stories of the Holocaust provide a way to examine the experience other women have of the World War II experience. American women relegated to the kitchen after World War II lost their ability to use writing to explore their experiences on the home front. A large-scale effort is now under way to recover the oral histories of the “Rosie the Riveters,” women who left their families and entered the workforce to support the war effort. Their stories were largely lost to us in the period after the war, in an effort to return to normalcy. Women lost the power to have their stories count in the mass rush to prop up and protect the men who returned. The Holocaust survivors' stories gave a voice to women who in other circumstances would not have been heard. They gave us the opportunity to begin to ask where the other stories we do not hear or see are.

Mary Lee Settle in her memoir *All The Brave Promises* gives an interesting account of a woman in the active duty arena, which was opened to many women in limited capacity for the first time officially during World War II. Her account of her time in England with the Woman's Auxiliary Air

Force is one of the first that allows us to examine the experience first hand for a woman in a new arena.

On the first day, while we were photographed like photographs in a jail, for our identity cards, we were given all-important serial numbers, at first on a clipboard pushed against our chins for the picture, then gradually tattooed on our brains. Old telephone numbers are gone, and addresses where I centered my life, but my serial number—2146391—and my rank—Aircraft Woman 2nd Class—are part of my identity, a scar that I will never lose. That identity, seeping through any former role, took over as the uniform began to set to my body, and the commands, the irresponsibility of being told every hour of the day what to do, became habit. Individual thought, another luxury, had to be buffed off. But that would be gradual, dangerous and unnoticed. (Sheldon 174)

Her memoir of this experience is still an example today of what the indoctrination into a military system presents for a woman. The loss of identity whether for men or women is, some would say, a necessary aspect of taking a job within a system that does not require individuals but rather requires order and symmetry in thought and action. It occurs that the indoctrination she recounts is one that could have been written by an Auschwitz survivor recalling a process of numbering and assimilation into a system that regarded them as numbers and not as names. What is it about systems of subservience and control that require participants to lose their identities and relate to the system by a number? The system that mechanically processes people can have no accounting for individuality or identity; it must wipe clean the markings we savor as personality. The system must treat people as pieces of material to be trained, transported, taken care of and eventually disposed of when no longer of use. At a time when many women were willing to find any way possible to help with the war effort, Settle's account of the avenues that were opening to women for the first time is a unique and remarkable memoir that still inspires questions about the military and the process of identity.

An interesting imaginative short story by Elizabeth Bowen, a well-known novelist who worked for the Ministry of Information in London during the war, is "Oh, Madam....", one of her wartime short stories in the collection *Demon Lover*, published in 1948 (Sheldon 353). This story is the one-sided monologue of a housekeeper who stays in her owner's house during the bombing

when everyone else has departed the bomb-damaged wreckage. This story may have been meant to show the pluck and determination of London's citizens in a time of stress and upheaval, but it also casts an interesting light on class issues that continue to occur during war. It is not a story of death, destruction, blood or pain, rather as Bowen said: "These are studies of climate, war-climate, and of the strange growths it raised. I see war (or should I say feel war) more as a territory than as a page of history" (Sheldon 130).

Well, I suppose we did, madam—that's if you come to think of it. They did seem to have quite set their hearts on us. I do not know how many went in the park. When it was not the bangs it was the hums...Well, I don't know, really—what could we do? As I say, all things come to an end. It would have sickened you, madam, to hear our glass going. Well, you've seen the front. No wonder you came in white. Then that ceiling down. I know I thought, 'Well, there does go the house!' Of course I ran up at once, but I couldn't do anything...The wardens were nice; they were very nice gentlemen. I don't know how they think of it all, I'm sure. (Sheldon 158)

This is a propaganda piece to some extent; but also something more. As a story commissioned by the English government in wartime, the piece seems to encourage the working class to hold fast, keep the faith and not question where the owner fled when the bombs dropped from the sky. At the same time, however, the story marks class distinction as an issue that isn't overcome in wartime. Bowen makes this point by writing from the housekeeper's perspective. The owner of the home who is being addressed never answers so that we hear her. Her unheard answers and the conversation's one-sidedness allow us as readers to explore only the thoughts of the housekeeper and distance us from identifying with the owner, or make that position uncomfortable. We as readers identify with the fear and panic the housekeeper must have been living through; alone huddled in a basement, trying to stay alive and at the same time trying to protect and keep safe her home that in reality is not her home at all. Bowen crafts a piece that on first glance seems an interesting piece of war writing; it could even be mistaken by the unwary as an illustration of class unity in wartime. On careful consideration, however, it works out complex levels of class, layered with hostility, resentment, fear and anger.

While we may tend to think of women in service during the war in munitions factories, civil service jobs or taking care of the domestic front, one of the amazing stories of World War II is the experience of Martha Gellhorn. A journalist who was a war correspondent for nearly fifty years, she traveled the globe looking for the next story to tell. Her stories were hard-hitting news pieces written for *Colliers* magazine. She traveled the front lines as what we now might call an embedded reporter and at times found her own way through the backside of the front lines with no help but her own determination.

Martha Gellhorn said in her book *The Face of War*, “These articles are in no way adequate descriptions of the indescribable misery of war. War is always worse than I knew how to say—always” (86). Her reports from the front lines gave us accounts of the Bomber boys’ struggle to contemplate and comprehend their destructive bombing runs over Germany in November 1943.

They have their job to do and they take this sort of life as it comes and do not think too much about it or about anything. There is only one clear universal thought and that is: finish it. Win the war and get it over with. There’s been enough; there’s been too much. The thing to do is win now soon, as fast as possible. (92)

She also reported on the Battle of the Bulge in January of 1945, the German counteroffensive that drove through Luxembourg and Belgium and was being driven back. It is her account of what “containing a fluid situation in Kraut-killing country looks like” (145), she states:

You can say the words ‘death and destruction’ and they don’t mean anything. But they are awful words when you are looking at what they mean. There were some German staff cars along the side of the road: they had not merely been hit by machine-gun bullets, they had been mashed into the ground. There were half-tracks and tanks literally wrenched apart, and a gun position directly hit by bombs. All around these lacerated or flattened objects of steel there was the usual ruffraff: papers, tin cans, cartridge belts, helmets, an odd shoe, clothing. There were also ignored and completely inhuman, the hard-frozen corpses of Germans. Then there was a clump of houses, burned and gutted, with only a few walls standing, and around them the enormous bloated bodies of cattle. (146)

Her account of the destruction is a striking account of her presence as a member of the press reporting on the front line. Was she one of the only women purposefully pursuing the story? Yes.

Her account of war must then be included in our contextual exploration of women writing war as a human experience of hostility.

One of Gellhorn's most moving and perhaps grotesque pieces was a story of her time spent at Dachau in May of 1945 shortly after the American forces had liberated the camp. Her words transmit to the reader the strange quality of voyeurism of the prisoners' lives: we feel as if we have been let in on a dirty little secret that some would prefer had stayed hidden. She tells of a Polish doctor held for five years who leads her around the camp as her tour guide on a trip of death. He tells her of a German doctor who was chief of the Army's tropical medicine research, who used Dachau as an experimental station. He mentions several experiments that thousands suffer through but the worst was this:

The guinea pigs were Polish priests. (Over two thousand priests passed through Dachau; one thousand are alive.) The German doctors injected streptococci germs in the upper leg of prisoners, between the muscle and the bone. An extensive abscess formed, accompanied by fever and extreme pain. The Polish doctor knew of more than one hundred cases treated this way; there may have been more. He had a record of 31 deaths, but it took usually from two to three months of ceaseless pain before the patient died and all of them died after several operations performed during the last few days of their life. The operations were further experiments to see if a dying man could be saved; but the answer was that he could not. (182)

Martha Gellhorn wrote her book in 1959 and updated it in 1988, but her original comment about the war writing that she had spent her lifetime doing, was that this book was a way to make the world leaders accountable for the human beings they lead:

But we need not follow in silence... I will not be herded any farther along this imbecile road to nothingness without raising my voice in protest. My NO will be effective as one cricket chirp. My NO is this book. (4)

For Martha Gellhorn writing was the way in which she answered the question of what it is possible for human beings to do to each other in the name of hostility. Writing was a way to keep the record straight, not letting the winners tell the story they wanted us to hear, but writing was also a way to scream at the top of her lungs that the answer can never be further hostility.

By the end of World War II, women were writing in many arenas, in many styles and emphases. What wasn't happening, however, was a lasting acknowledgement by the establishment that women's writing about war and its impact had its own way of contributing to the total picture of what war looks like. Similar to what took place after World War I, the story of the war told by historians is a crafted picture that shuffles women to the domestic side, ignores their contributions, and places their tales of survival second to story of massive campaigns, war heroes, and the might of the right. Women's stories of and about World War II and their experiences are just now being sought and anthologized in scholarship of the kind that has been done on World War I. As people moved beyond the war and began to experience life through an uptake of consumerism, new mediums began to develop that pushed the experience of war away from writing and into a visual mode through the television screen. The Korean War (1950-1953) was for many Americans a remote and distant experience. Men who were largely veterans of World War II left their families behind and went to the front, and American women were removed from the conflict and the remoteness was evident in the absence of writing of women experiencing war. Korean women and their stories are largely unavailable to an American audience and scholarship at this time.

The Vietnam War (1965-1978) was a conflict that was never declared a war, even though, for the people involved, whether American, Vietnamese or French, it was a war. If we use Claire Tylee's description of war as a state of hostility between human beings, there can be no question that war was taking place on a very large scale. Women who wrote the Vietnam War experience were, for the most part, women who served in the field as civilian and active duty nurses, as well as those left behind on the home front; wives, mothers, daughters and girlfriends.

Martha Gellhorn was still actively writing as a journalist/war correspondent, but the stories she wrote portraying the brutal effects of war on the Vietnamese people were not getting published. She struggled to find an avenue to join other voices of dissent and bear witness to the truth of war's

effects on the people of Vietnam. She reported for the *Guardian*, a magazine based out of London. She said, in retrospect: “I wanted to be read, to be heard, and I knew I had to write carefully. There are smarmy sentences in those reports that I wrote with gritted teeth” (Gellhorn 262). For many authors, writing about war seems to be compartmentalized, in an effort to describe or delineate the undescrivable, often seen as detached situation, circumstance or event. It is seldom about the entirety of war: we are seldom offered a broad scope picture of what war is and what it does. Writing about war seems to be less about the horrors or atrocities that are possible to describe, than it is about what people already expect to hear or are willing to publish. Writing has to work on readers by offering something they either did not know, did not want to know or knew and needed to be reminded of. Perhaps the reason Martha Gellhorn and women like her had trouble getting their pieces published was that people did not want to know, and they did not want women to be the ones to tell them, and for that reason even a popular, established journalist like Gellhorn had trouble publishing this kind of work.

Other women working actively to find a voice for their concerns, truths and experiences struggled to find avenues to tell their stories as well. The gap between writing and experience seems to be at its widest when we consider Vietnam. Patricia Walsh, who wrote *Forever Sad the Hearts*, an autobiographical novel based on her time spent as a nurse anesthetist in Vietnam, was not published until the mid 1980s. Her account of her time spent in a Da Nang civilian hospital, focuses not just on her youthful idealistic ambitions and the crashing reality that was Vietnam, but also bears witness to the horrors of patching up wounded soldiers who would never lead normal lives again (Carter 158).

There seemed to be numbers and labels for everyone—K.I.A’s, M.I.A’s, wounded in action, enemy killed. But this war needs a new category, a name for those who could be saved by rapid evacuation and modern technology but could never return to a normal life. The ones who would spend the rest of their days lying in deteriorating Veterans’ Hospitals, hidden away in dark corners because of their grotesqueness, or sent home to hide within the shelter

of their families from a society that did not wish to be reminded of this unpopular war. They were the Vietnam M.I.L.'s Missing in Life. (Walsh, 119)

Her story transmits not just the horror but the helplessness one would feel saving those injured, only to have them live lives of despair and shame. War does shameful things to those we ask to fight, and nowhere quite like Vietnam was the shame so apparent to the men who fought. Walsh's story portrays what it is like for a woman to serve in roles that society prescribes as appropriate when dealing with war—as a caretaker, a supportive, caring and feeling healer of the wounded. Walsh's story is rife with anger and resentment at being asked to do such things with idealism and pride and being forced to share its ugliness and shame.

Barthy Byrd wrote about the Vietnam War. She was never there, never had a loved one there and she was not a survivor, but as a woman, she felt entitled to write about Vietnam. She felt that the context of the Vietnam War was often one that had lost the voices of women who might be seeking to tell their stories. At the time she wrote her book in 1986, she was a professor of journalism and mass communications at University of Texas at El Paso. She spent twelve years in broadcast news as a reporter, anchor and news director. I am sure she covered war and felt its consequences as much as anyone who lived in the United States of America did in the 1960s and 1970s. Her context for writing is to tell other women's experiences, to highlight their stories as worthy and valid in the context of the Vietnam War. She says, "there are thousands more victims to whom little attention is paid. They did none of the planning, none of the fighting, none of the killing. But they, too, have paid for the wreckage brought home and the wreckage left behind" (Byrd 1). She covers the oral histories of nine women whose lives were impacted in some way by their contact with the military community and Vietnam.

There is the story of Whitney Brown, the daughter of a colonel in the Air Force, who spends her teenage years on Guam where her father worked for the Strategic Air Command and her mother volunteered in hospitals to nurse the injured (Byrd 5). Her story relates the pain she witnessed seeing

young men barely older than her come to Guam maimed and disfigured. It is a story about what it is to be young and innocent, in the face of the gruesome results of war.

There is also the story of Ellen Dale, the mother of Jack Dale, an M.I.A./ P.O.W presumed dead in Vietnam since 1965. Her story begins as one of pride in a son who volunteered to do his duty and learned to fly planes. Within three months of being in country, his plane went missing. It is her story of aching loss and betrayal by the Army who was supposed to help her and save her son. She waits for four years for information from the Army and it never comes, so she joins the National League of Families of P.O.W's and M.I.A's and seeks answers about her son wherever she can find them. She holds a memorial service for her son, but she says, "You can't kill your own son in your mind. I can never stop thinking, My God if he's alive, what must he be going through?" (Byrd 16). She calls herself a loyal American but feels betrayed by the government's lack of action. She says, "I'll take my grandson to Canada before I let him go to another Vietnam. They even think of sending my grandson to a place like El Salvador and we'll leave" (Byrd 16).

Barthy Byrd also writes the oral history of Le Ngoc Thanh, a Vietnamese woman born in 1957 in Dalat, a vacation village in the mountains. Her father was a military officer in the South Vietnamese Army who was away from their village for long periods of time. She felt her life was relatively untouched by the conflict in her country until 1975 when her father sent for her family to make their way to Saigon. In the story, her family decides to stay in Vietnam when the country falls to the North. Her father volunteers to go to a re-education camp for what he believes will be three months but in fact turns out to be seven years. Her family returns to Dalat but their futures are in doubt. Because of her father's military career, they are now suspect, kept away from jobs and education. Her mother attempts to help Le Ngoc escape but Le Ngoc is caught in the process and sent to prison for a month until her mother is able to bribe someone to free her. By 1977, her mother realizes that she must send all of her children away and works out an elaborate escape plan,

which enables all of her children to safely make their way to Thailand, onto Malaysia and eventually the United States by 1979. Le Ngoc did not hear from her mother until 1983. Her father was eventually released and returned to Dalat. She cannot send money or goods to her parents, she rarely hears from them and she prays to once again, reunite with her parents (Byrd 23).

These are just three of the nine moving and emotion-filled stories included in Byrd's *Home Front: Women and Vietnam*. They are just nine of thousands of oral histories of women who experienced interacting with the military and Vietnam. Byrd's writing of these histories allows us to experience women's stories that may have otherwise gone unheard. Her ability to write the Vietnam experience of women who loved and lost sons, husbands and fathers while balancing that grief and pain with the stories of women who experienced Vietnam differently, is a powerful way of resisting the silence that women feel about their stories. Her writing gave a voice to all of the women's whose histories she imagined in her book. Like the multiple echo of Martha Gellhorn, it is their "No" screamed out to the world so that their sacrifices will not go unappreciated and cannot be swept under the rug.

Other women fiction writers have begun to use the Vietnam War as a way to explore its ramifications on those left behind, and their experiences with those who return. Louise Erdrich wrote a short story in 1973, *A Bridge*, a twin tale of a young runaway girl, Albertine, and Henry, a young Native American soldier just returned from Vietnam. Henry has returned after spending fifteen months in country: nine as a soldier and six as a prisoner of war of the North Vietnamese Army. Erdrich never tells us that Henry is a damaged soul but we know he cannot be otherwise. She gently steps around his torments letting the reader sense them just beneath Henry's careful taut exterior.

He had seen so many with their children, possessions, animals tied in cloths across their backs, under their breasts, bundles dragged in frail carts. He had seen them bolting under fire, arms wrapped around small packages. Some of the packages, loosely held the way hers was, exploded. (Erdrich 171)

Erdrich is striving to incorporate the male experience of Vietnam with a world that is now foreign to Henry. He returns to find the world he knows has not changed by the effects of bombs and guns, but it is Henry who has done the changing. Erdrich as a female author is working to identify how disembodied the world must seem to those who return home from war, to a place that at least appears unchanged. I think Erdrich is working in much the same way that Pat Barker does in her *Regeneration* novels about World War I soldiers. They are both trying to find a way to express the effects that war has on the individual psyche, and society's psyche as well. They both ask a rhetorical question about how we—meaning those who live in a place removed from the front lines—attempt to understand or avoid understanding the effects that battle and killing have on the mechanisms of human relations. Claiming this territory for women authors, as their space in which to write, they allow us—the outsiders or those left behind—to find a way to empathize with the soldiers as individuals who struggle with the jobs they have been drafted or volunteered to do. We are given a gift by these women that opens the door to accepting the individual while grieving for the consequences of war, great and small.

Vietnam as a war represented so many things; shame, anger, place, country, whatever is close-but-distant, frustration, pity and turmoil. In the process of crossing from event to context, the war became a symbol for generations of hurt, damaged, broken, men: an inclusive, many-faceted event that women could now begin to explore as symbol, figure and reality. Women could talk about violence committed by men on them because the men were somehow damaged by the war. Women could explore war in a way that would open up relevant discussions about the experience without actually having to have been on the field pulling a trigger.

Women explored the Vietnam War -its context, its history and its power as an imaginative force in many other ways. They have written poetry, plays, stories of grief and stories of triumph. All these modes have been valid explorations of the military experience and its community of

contextual layers. Military communities are not just those that are the active duty soldier or sailor, their spouses or their children. War expands the military community to those outside of the insular institutions of military experience. War is the bridge that allows us to understand that when women write stories or literature in response to, in fear of, about, near or in spite of (war), we all are a part of a military community. Whether we ask for a defense of our borders and policies, by draft, as was carried out in this country until 1973, or by an all-volunteer military, we partake of and are layered within a military community. If war is state of hostility between human beings, the militarized state is therefore a constant condition of life that portrays hostility to the rest of the world. Claire Tylee in her book makes the point that people live their lives by ordering the way they fit into society: how well people fit will manifest how they see the world, which will be apparent in what they write. Conflict and hostility are that, and what both men and women do write is what war is, but what cannot continue is the idea that experience is gendered to be a wholly male existence or experience. Women are part of the context in which war takes place. It often takes women's writing to establish that context, to make it evident that war is not just something happening "Over There," as the words of a well-known World War I song would have it.

What has been a most interesting aspect of this scholarly effort to identify women as belonging to military communities writing war and peace, was that the original intention was to explore the writings of women in the post-Vietnam-era against the backdrop of a rich, diverse, though uncelebrated community of women who came before them. What became clear after much exploration and searching of the literature for what I was almost certain existed about military communities and war from the mid 80s to the first Persian Gulf War was that stories by women were not being written. Women are no longer writing in a current contextual way about the military, a militarized existence, war, peace, survivors' stories of military experiences or fictional accounts of war. Perhaps what look like opportunities are in fact obstacles, at least where writing is

concerned. As avenues for women to become more richly enmeshed within military circles, women serve on active duty in combat zones in new capacities, with new responsibilities; these women have not used writing as a way to reveal themselves. Women who are interacting with the military community as wives of soldiers and sailors aren't writing their stories of loss (and there have been losses). Women who have served in the front lines as humanitarian aid workers seeing the results that a militarized existence wreaks are not writing their stories of suffering and trauma. Women who have been embedded as reporters aren't writing the stories Martha Gellhorn would demand they write: the truth. Where are the women? Where have they gone? Why do they no longer feel they have access to this realm of conflict and their place in the context of that existence? We can't say they don't have a rich and complex historical record of women writing their stories, for we have just seen they do. I believe there are several reasons why and several factors to consider.

To begin to look for answers, we must look at ourselves as women and ask what value we place on telling our stories to each other about ourselves. In an effort to examine women's issues of self-perception in a tight military community, Margaret Harrell, an anthropology analyst for the Rand corporation, conducted interviews with over 100 junior enlisted Army wives. Her book *Invisible Women: Junior Enlisted Army Wives* provides a detailed look at stereotypes regarding the lives of these women. This group of wives is considered to be:

young, immature, lower class spouses who are in financial difficulty and who have difficulty controlling their reproductive tendencies. This is a stereotype widely held by the military community at large, including other junior enlisted personnel and spouses who speak disparagingly of their cohorts. (Harrell 12)

Harrell's study was an attempt to examine whether these women's stories about themselves matched the common stereotype. She found that while they might in some aspects of their lives embody the stereotype, their self-evaluation as "invisible" was particularly striking. They felt invisible from the military system; as wives of active duty soldiers, they felt large separations between the wife's private life and the husband's professional life. They were often isolated off the base away

from the housing available for families, post services and support mechanisms. They felt isolated as wives from other wives by virtue of their husbands' profession, with no fraternization policies in place between officer and enlisted personnel. This policy frequently applies to the wives as well. Wives are encouraged to make friends and develop support systems of fellow wives, but only as long as they are of the same rank group. An officer's wife should socialize with other officers' wives. A senior enlisted man's wife should socialize with senior enlisted wives (Non-Commissioned Officers). Junior enlisted wives are encouraged to seek and develop friendships among each other as well. This is a way of protecting active duty personnel from developing relationships outside of the workplace. It is an effort to limit conflicts amongst the active duty members that may arise out of giving and receiving orders under the military command structure. It hampers not just positive mentoring and friendships from developing among the active duty members, but it also isolates the wives from those with the most experience dealing with the military and its huge bureaucracy, the wives who have been around the longest.

The wives also felt isolated financially and many of those interviewed were actively taking part in welfare programs (food stamps or W.I.C. -Women, Infants and Children). This was not necessarily because of their inability to manage their money, but rather because the level of pay for many junior enlisted personnel is in fact quite low. For young people with few skills taught or learned about how to make a small paycheck go farther, they often carry large loads of debt, sometimes a result of moves to several locations at the request of the military; sometimes a result of impulse-buying. Whatever the reason, they struggle financially, and many of them "qualify" for Food Stamps and Welfare programs. Many of the spouses were unable to afford adequate daycare, if they had children. With no extended family networks in place (grandparents, mothers, aunts) because they lived with the military member far from their home state, they must rely on friends or

other wives to provide the necessary daycare. This often affects a wife's ability to work outside the home, thereby further isolating her from the civilian community.

If as Ms. Harrell's study indicates, these working-class women were taking on a feeling of invisibility from the military system of power that has the most immediate effect on their daily lives, then it would follow that their self-identification when it comes to writing their experiences (good or bad) would be nonexistent. They would take on the stereotype of the lower-class identity and find no value in expressing and recording their experiences. Silence, isolation, and invisibility are inter-related. The words carry meanings that invoke shame, contempt, and disengagement. If this group of women is speaking of their invisibility as a status of living in a world that cannot see them and in which they cannot be seen, it is a powerful statement about the world in which these women exist. Their existence is covered in meanings that breed the emotions that perpetuate the silence. Their choice to remain silent postpones and worsens the dilemma they and other women find themselves dealing with everyday of their lives. The silence freezes them in contradictions that become less and less bearable. Silence is a symptom that something is wrong. Silence and invisibility are not a natural or inevitable existence.

If enlisted wives are not writing, what about stereotypically college-educated officers' wives? This stereotype would seem to privilege them in a way that would allow them to think they could write or could find a way to write a story that would have value. In a historical note: General William T. Sherman (1870) encouraged wives of his officers to keep their own diaries to record their experiences (Crossley and Keller xxxiii). Most of the surviving historical material about nineteenth century military wives is letters, diaries and memoirs of officers' wives (Harrell 71). They have a tradition then that would encourage writing as a way of recording their direct contact with the military experience and yet they too have stopped writing. If we examine writing as a class-based

exercise for this community, it would seem that identification with a privileged group is by no means a contributing factor that at this time encourages these women to write.

It would also be helpful to think of the role of a military spouse regardless of her husbands' status as officer or enlisted. Her role and identity within a relationship is what I like to think of as more than "half" of the whole. In a relationship within the civilian world, women may tend to think of themselves in a marriage as equal partners. Couples have a balanced relationship whereby two spouses support each other in their endeavors as a married couple. In a relationship for married couples within the military, that role of equality is skewed. A wife for instance may find her husband to be extremely supportive and helpful when he is home, but when the time comes for deployment into the field, the wife is left to her own devices. If she is a parent, she will now become both mother and father for her child. She will have no one to balance against, much as a single parent might operate in the civilian world. As well, the wife will have to take over any responsibilities the husband may have handled while at home. She is now the sole caretaker of the home, finances, health-care decisions, cars and maintenance. While deployments can vary by service, a Navy wife for example can expect to be alone, in peacetime, up to six months for one deployment, or longer with combined deployments, managing as a single parent or wife while still maintaining a married identity. The Air Force usually has the least amount of deployments into the field, while the Marines and the Army can have anywhere from a month to two months in the field for training and exercises several times a year. This of course is during peace; in recent years, from the early 90s forward, our troops have been deployed for long periods in service in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Panama, Grenada, Iraq, Korea, Afghanistan and many other places around the world.

A wife then who in most cases was already managing family, work, and home, with a military spouse is expected to carry more than half of the responsibilities, while the husband was deployed. In this instance, the question becomes, if her role as a support mechanism for her family

requires more than “half”, would she have the time to consider writing as a means to expressing her situation. She would constantly be in service to her household as wife and mother while sheltering all of the responsibilities for the family on her shoulders alone. She has no one to help provide the mental and physical space and time required to write. She must constantly be a source of power and strength to her family, and at the same time carve out a mental space that gets her through each day.

One of the types of writing that women who are military wives have been doing in the last several years has been to publish what I call self-help books. Lydia Sloan Cline has written *Today's Military Wife: Meeting the Challenges of Service Life*, 1989, with chapters about military benefits, socials and protocol, or “home is where the military sends you.” This is a book that “is designed to help you make the most of your life in the military, whether your spouse is a career military member or in for just a few years” (Cline 19). Another book is *Married to the Military*, by Meredith Leyva, a self-described guide “to help you take control at every point of your serviceman’s career” (Leyva). Another example of this type of writing is *The Army Wife Handbook*, by Ann Crossley and Carol A. Keller originally published in 1990 with a second edition published in 1993. It claims that it is a “social handbook – a reference book that describes not only the currently correct protocol and etiquette practiced in Army society, but explains the traditions that are in transition” (Crossley and Keller xviii). All of these books are self-described ways to encourage military wives to work within the system, in effect encouraging them to be good wives and find acceptable ways of behaving and presenting themselves to the world. While I find they have a place for a wife who may need to find access to information that is unavailable in other ways, they do not encourage independent thought.

Lydia Sloan Cline states in her book:

The women who sincerely try to “bloom where they’re planted” are the ones happiest in their environments. They are the ones who learn the most, see the most and know the most. They make the system work for them. The wife who refuses...who otherwise distances herself from the military community does herself a disservice. (Cline 19)

In other words, find ways to work within the system and the system will work for you. It is a nod to the consumer culture that we live in, that these books are entrepreneurial efforts to silence and codify, what is and is not acceptable behavior. The only story that has capital then is the story about fitting in and finding acceptance. Stories of struggle about breaking new barriers and striving for new ground while challenging the status quo have no place in this market of complacency.

This type of writing appears similar to the propaganda machine of World War I. Mrs. Humphry Ward was a signatory of C.F.G. Masterman's "Author's Manifesto" in which several leading authors pledged to support the war through their writing. Masterman was the head of the War Propaganda Bureau; he enlisted literary figures to help with the production of propaganda materials. Mrs. Humphry Ward's book *England's Effort*, 1916, was in the form of several letters to Theodore Roosevelt, designed to show the war to the American people (Smith 6). Like the wives of today's military who are writing only of how they can encourage each other to work within the system, Mrs. Ward's book encourages a vision of war and the military that is complacent and homogeneous.

Another way to examine the avenues women might have to writing military communities would be to look at women who are on active duty and examine the ways in which they have either written or not written their stories. According to a 2002 report published by the Military Family Resource Center in conjunction with the Department of Defense, there are 210,177 women on active duty. Those women make up 15% of the active duty force as compared to 46.6% of the civilian United States workforce that is female. There are 642,474 women who are spouses of active duty military members. That means there are over 852,651 women as of 2002 who are currently making up the two communities of women interacting with the military, one domestic and the other active duty. Of the 210,000 women who are currently on active duty and the thousands who have passed before them, we have to ask, where are their stories?

Patricia Thomas and Marie Thomas write in *The Military Family in Peace and War* about women and mothers in uniform during the Gulf War. They quote from Pentagon sources that 541,000 troops served in that war and 35,000 of them were women. Sixteen thousand three hundred (16,300) of those troops were single parents, one-third of who were women. One thousand two hundred (1,200) women were members of dual military couples serving with both partners in the war (Thomas 37). All of these women would have faced conflict over their service in the military in a time of hostility. They faced conflict on a personal, social and cultural level. Women with children who served in the war were portrayed in the press and media reports to be bad mothers who abandoned their children to family members to run off and play war (Thomas 36). They served in new capacities for the first time, flying jets and riding in Search and Rescue helicopters. They bunked with male colleagues in limited conditions that were, while not on the front line, certainly in the military theater. They underwent daily threats of S.C.U.D. missile attacks and chemical weapons. They saw the wounded in hospitals and clinics that followed the troops. They treated Iraqi prisoners and helped Kuwaiti citizens.

From August 7, 1990 when troops first began to deploy to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield, through Operation Desert Storm from January 16, 1991 to April 6, 1991, including the return of troops and the continued enforcement of the no-fly zone over Iraq, women served. They were there; they were witnesses; why are their stories somehow the least visible aspect of what we know about this war? Rhonda Cornum's story, written by Peter Copeland, was the only story available about women in the Persian Gulf. *She Went to War* is the moving story of Major Cornum's experience as a surgeon, mother, helicopter pilot, wife and prisoner of war. She was one of two women taken as prisoners of war during the Gulf War. She was flying as a flight surgeon in the back of a Black Hawk helicopter on a search and rescue mission to retrieve a downed and wounded F-16 pilot, Captain Bill Andrews. Her helicopter, piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Robert Godfrey and

Chief Warrant Officer Philip Garvey who were experienced instructor pilots from Fort Rucker, Alabama, was shot down at night over the desert on February 27, 1991. She and Sergeant Troy Dunlap were the only survivors of the crash. They were taken prisoners by the Iraqi Republican Guard. She was transported with her injuries--multiple broken bones in her arms-- to Baghdad and held prisoner until March 5, 1991. Her account is the story not just of her capture and imprisonment, but the story of her life in the military and her choices to become a medical professional who also served her country.

Major Cornum and her ghostwriter Mr. Copeland tell the story of Rhonda finding herself accepted within military circles as a woman and physician. She portrays herself as an exception to the rule, finding herself as different from other women through her experience and profession. She also portrays herself as an exception to citizens who may not find the need to challenge themselves as she has; it is through her hard work and dedication that she succeeds. For her, the path through the military, while not easy was not one of sexual harassment, conflict, or turmoil. This is not surprising, according to Patricia Thomas and Marie Thomas, who cite a 1988 study of women Air Force officers: "assimilation required adapting their roles to conform to male standards...but they recognized and accepted they were not men at the same time knowing they were not 'typical' women. Therefore they became 'the exception' or the 'other'" (Thomas 41). Rhonda Cornum's portrayal of herself as an exceptional woman is therefore how she must see herself in the male-centered world of the military. It would be easy to compare her experience to other women military members' self-portrayals if there were any others. Without other stories of what life is like for military women in the theater of the Persian Gulf War, her story does stand alone as an exception to all rules. Since her piece was, however, not her creation, not her own heroic act of writing, it is difficult to compare her story to all the others, who create a history of writing before her. The use of the ghostwriter diminishes her ability to tell her story in a heroic way that would allow me to

celebrate her writing as well as her story. There is something heroic in the act of writing that, for women, must be encouraged as much as the exploration of what it is that women must talk about.

For women in the civilian world during the Persian Gulf War and the unruly world that emerged, 14 years should be enough time from experience forward to start seeing writing about war. Men have been writing that War and other conflicts since, without fail. There has been no lapse in production for men writing the war story/ the war experience. We only have to look at novels like *Black Hawk Down* and *JarHead* to see that the mystique of a male-centered war story still exists and can be written about today's conflicts.

Lastly, to consider the larger contextual surface of how the war is portrayed may have some effect on women's writing. War today is portrayed on our televisions 24 hours a day. Tylee's description of hostile actions would fit every newscast and every newspaper. We are surrounded by its effects and constantly bombarded with warnings and fear, but we live in a relatively stable environment. Martha Gellhorn wrote about the "fear syndrome" during the Vietnam War:

The fear syndrome, by exaggerating Vietcong power for destruction, misplaces the real pain of the real war, and is immensely dangerous. It leads to hysteria, to hawk-demands for bigger war; it pushes us nearer and nearer to World War Three. The fear syndrome in no way serves the American cause; it can only jeopardize more American lives, with the ultimate risk of jeopardizing all life. (254)

Her words are prophetic. If we take out the word Vietcong and add Iraq, take out World War Three and add Holy War/ War on Terror, she is writing war today. The fear syndrome pervades women's lives. They feel themselves constantly under siege and so constantly under the pervasive air of war. But, it is also a pervasive air that is removed and far away. It is something that takes place in other people's lands, in other people's living rooms. American women can turn off their televisions and forget they live in hostile times because their children do not go hungry and they do not have their homes bombed or their loved ones missing. Other than September 11, 2001, most American women living today have had no direct experience with the effects and devastation of war. Are we

asking too much to find a literature emerge from fear-driven complacency that leads to a tune out and a turn off of writing the military community or the militarized existence of their lives? Maybe we are looking for something that cannot happen anymore; maybe the literature that emerged from previous wars and hostilities was the effect of a society that valued writing and expression as a form of culture.

Women must shake off the need to protect others from harsh realities. Patriotism and consumerism act as silencers. They work by concealing and enforcing fake protection. Patriotism leads women who interact with the military to feel their loyalty will be questioned. Loyalty and patriotism are buzzwords for concealing the truth. The word patriotic is closely linked with patriarchy—from the Greek *patrios* “of one’s father.” The words loyalty and patriotism seek to protect and defend a patriarchal system that does not protect the world’s mothers, daughters, or son’s from harm. The words protect the systems in place that act as the worlds’ bully, at home and abroad. Women’s voices must be raised to demand their inclusion. Their voices must rise above the buzzwords that encompass their world and seek to silence them in shame, contempt and invisibility. Their voices must say loyalty and patriotism have nothing to do with the truth. Women must find a voice about the military and about war. It is their context. It is their experience, and their stories are true representations of what the world looks like.

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