

Contemporary Soldier Stories and the Game of Propaganda: The War on Terror, and some Folkloric Reflections on the War in Iraq

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the world of confusion of identity, purpose and hurt associated with the various ‘western’ forces involved in this Allied campaign against ‘Terror’, with special reference to the war in Iraq. The treatment is associated with propaganda, song, trauma, Australian perceptions of, and attitudes to, all of this conflict. Song, WikiLeaks, etc. are explored, and the whole is linked to the earlier Australian culture of the folk-rock track, ‘I was Only Nineteen’.

‘A hero of war
Is that what they see
Just medals and scars
So damn proud of me
And I brought home that flag
Now it gathers dust
But it’s the flag that I love
It’s the only flag I trust.’¹

The America-led War on Terror haunts a great number of men and women across the globe—from those who have been the subjects of enquiries and detention, to the *whanau* (the bereft women) of those who have been lost in conflict, and so, too, to the very soldiers themselves who have participated in it. Coupled with the popular culture accounts, we have seen countless news reports, and narrative ‘true story’ books, about the tales of individual soldiers who served within the conflict.² One overwhelming similarity runs through most of these accounts—a deep pain and sorrow about the events of the ‘War on Terror’ and the emotional and physical scars that it has left on not only individuals, but on proximate and other societies as a whole—as shown in Andrew

¹ Rise Against, ‘Hero of War’, on *Appeal to Reason* (DGC/Interscope, 2008: Audio CD), Track 10. Notably this CD peaked at number three on the United States of America’s Billboard 200.

² For example see: Andrew Exum, *This Man’s Army: A Soldier’s Story from the Front Line of the War on Terror* (Putnam: Penguin, 2005).

Exum's conclusion from his own tale about being a soldier within the War on Terror: 'no matter a war's outcome, the soldier never wins.'³

Consequently, we have seen a rise in the number of soldiers' stories appearing within popular culture formats, much like that in the lyrics of the popular folk ballad, *Hero of War*, by the Chicago-based punk-rock inspired band, 'Rise Against'—that depict the pain and angst suffered by individuals—both on the American side and on the part of those held captive by the American armed forces. When asked about the themes within the band's lyrics, in general—not specifically regarding *Hero of War*—vocalist Tim McIlrath explained that 'it's not so much as we're a political band, but what we feel is our social responsibility'.⁴

For folklorists, and social anthropologists, an insight into cultural trends and shifts within society can be gained through analysing the way that popular culture texts—such as music, films and television—position significant contemporary historical events. Consequently, in this discussion, the present writer intends to discuss key themes within the way that these constructed depictions of soldiers, and the War on Terror relate to the real life experiences of individuals and how as a society we have interacted with those historical events—framing them with key passages from the lyrics of the song *Hero of War*, as a representative text of that genre.

Extraordinary Rendition

I kicked in the door
I yelled my commands
The children they cried
But I got my man
We took him away
Bag over his face
From his family and his friends.⁵

Extraordinary rendition (or irregular rendition) is the process of abducting and then the extrajudicial transferring of prisoners from one nation to another. In many cases—especially those associated with the use of extraordinary rendition by the United States of America, relating to the War on Terror—people have been removed to locations where torture is then practised.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ McIlrath, Tim, in 'Rise Against Biography', *Sing365.com*, <<http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/rise-against-biography/6e8a2dcf847a438548256c6f000a9715>> [accessed 2 December 2010].

⁵ Rise Against, 'Hero of War'.

Tales of Extraordinary Rendition have flooded through the media since the events of September 11, 2001, including both news and fictional media (film, television and print) as a result of the aircraft hijacking, the destruction of the Trade Centre, Twin Towers, and the onset of the War on Terror. In 2007, the film *Extraordinary Rendition* depicted a man abducted from London and then secretly flown to a foreign land where he was detained in complete isolation and brutally tortured for months. Eventually he was dumped back in the United Kingdom and left to try to find his way in a society that he no longer trusted or related to.⁶ These kinds of tales have spread deep within the American entertainment industry—so far as the popular NBC crime drama, *Crossing Jordan*, airing an episode titled *Post Hoc* in 2007 in part depicting this phenomenon.

In the *Post Hoc* episode of *Crossing Jordan*, Dr. Mahesh ‘Bug’ Vijay is abducted and held incommunicado by the Department of Homeland Security. During that abduction he was interrogated and tortured using a technique known as waterboarding.⁷ Throughout the series Dr. Vijay is shown to be an honourable man and a brilliant scientist, who seemingly fell victim to a combination of coincidence and racial profiling.

Waterboarding is a torture technique that has been largely associated with the War on Terror. In 2007 there were strongly presented reports that the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had widely used it on extrajudicial prisoners after having the procedure approved by the American Department of Justice.⁸ As *Wikipedia* has recognized, these reports are highly ironic, since the United States of America hung ‘Japanese soldiers for waterboarding American prisoners of war in World War II’.⁹ The waterboarding torture involves binding victims and gagging them, then pouring water over the mouth to create a gag response and the sensations of drowning. It has been noted that waterboarding not only causes severe psychological damage, but that it can also cause grave physical harm and suffering.

Notably, however, there is a history of American forces themselves using waterboarding. In 1968, during the Vietnam War, there was a photo published in *The Washington Post* depicting an American soldier torturing a man with the waterboarding technique. In that case the torturer was court-martialled after the image was published. *The Washington Post* has also noted that CIA interrogation training manuals

⁶ *Extraordinary Rendition*, directed by Jim Threapleton (Ultrafilm, 2007).

⁷ *Crossing Jordan*, ‘Post Hoc’, written by Tim Kring, Kathy McCormick and Lynne E. Litt, directed by Jill Hennessy (NBC, 2007).

⁸ See ‘History of an Interrogation Technique: Water Boarding’, World News with Charles Gibson (ABC News, 29 November 2005). <<http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/Investigation/story?id=1356870>> [accessed 17 April 2009].

⁹ ‘Waterboarding’, *Wikipedia* <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterboarding>> [accessed 1 December 2010].

have included similar techniques and that in the post-Vietnam era waterboarding was included as part of training for the special Navy SEALs and some Army Special Forces.¹⁰

Coupled with that the general public has been faced with the knowledge of the detention Camps at Guantánamo Bay—a United States of America detention facility housed on foreign soil (in Cuba) and set up by the Bush administration in 2002. Notably there were several assertions by the Bush administration that detainees within the Guantánamo facility were not entitled to the protections of the Geneva Conventions. Evidence exists that the American administration approved treatment of the captives at Guantánamo Bay in ways that would be considered torture by many other nations.

In 2007 George Bush was quoted, from a press conference in the White House, as stating that the American ‘government does not torture people. We stick to US law and our international obligations.’¹¹ However, Bush’s claims came at the same time as ‘reports in *The New York Times* ... said memos from the justice department authorised simulated drowning, head-slapping, exposure to frigid temperatures and lengthy periods of sleep deprivation as legally acceptable techniques by CIA agents’.¹² Notably, and on several occasions, the Bush administration insisted that waterboarding is not a form of torture.

More recently George Bush has gone so far as to openly state that ‘people were waterboarded and I believe that decision saved lives.’¹³ Responding to those claims the British media has been quick to turn to statements from Sir John Sawers (head of the Secret Intelligence Service in the United Kingdom) who said that ‘torture is illegal and abhorrent under any circumstances and we [the United Kingdom] have nothing whatsoever to do with it.’¹⁴ In that same media report, Lord Macdonald of River Glaven—who has served as a Director of Public Prosecutions—was quoted suggesting that the claims that lives were saved through the instances of torture, that Bush has recently admitted, were unsubstantiated, and that there was no evidence of the torture leading to

¹⁰ Pincus, Walter, ‘Waterboarding Historically Controversial’, in *The Washington Post* (5 October 2006) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/04/AR2006100402005.html>> [accessed 1 December 2010].

¹¹ Bush, George, in ‘Bush denies CIA uses torture’, *Al Jazeera* (6 October 2007). <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2007/10/2008525124717996262.html>> [accessed 2 December 2010].

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Bush, George, in Praveen Swami, ‘Bush Claims Supporting Waterboarding Backed by Intelligence Officials’, *The Telegraph* (9 November 2010) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/8120938/Bush-claims-supporting-waterboarding-backed-by-intelligence-officials.html>> [accessed 2 December 2010].

¹⁴ In Praveen Swami, ‘Senior Blair Figures Question George W Bush Waterboarding Claims’, *The Telegraph* (10 November 2010) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/8121958/Senior-Blair-figures-question-George-W-Bush-waterboarding-claims.html>> [accessed 2 December 2010].

any positive outcome. Amidst this flurry of news reports, however, on 16 November 2010, a BBC World News broadcast reports that the United Kingdom had agreed to pay millions of dollars in compensation to Guantánamo Bay detainees whose torture UK officials were aware of, and had failed to protect them from, rather than allow the case to reach courts—where imaginably they may have been required to produce documents causing further incrimination—and, all too probably, recriminations.

American justifications for these actions have in several cases been based upon a memorandum that the Assistant Attorney General of the United States of America, Jay Bybee, sent on August 1, 2002. In that memorandum, a legal opinion was offered that it could be justified that under the Convention Against Torture, torture was only severely painful acts that caused ‘serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death’. It also went on to claim that

prosecution [for authorising torture] under Section 2340A may be barred because enforcement of the statute would represent an unconstitutional infringement of the President’s authority to conduct war, [as] under the current circumstances, necessity or self-defense may justify interrogation methods that might violate Section 2340A.¹⁵

Following the Bybee memorandum, Donald Rumsfeld, the USA Secretary of Defence, signed a document on December 2, 2002 that listed some eighteen methods that could, from that point, be officially used by the United States when interrogating captives. Arguably, that document had then empowered the use of techniques such as waterboarding upon the individuals that the United States was detaining in Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay, Afghanistan, and other key locations as part of the practice of extraordinary rendition.¹⁶

Notably, the impact of Guantánamo Bay touched some Australians in a special way, not only as a nation actively involved in the War on Terror as an ally to the United States of America, but also in that Australian citizen, David Hicks, was one of the men who was subjected to torture there. In 2001 Hicks was captured by the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and then apparently sold to the United States forces before being transported to Guantánamo. The claims associated with Hicks’

¹⁵ Bybee, Jay, in ‘Torture Memos: Standards for Conduct of Interrogation under 18 U.S.C. sections 2340-2340A’, *Wikipedia* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torture_Memos#Interrogation_of_al_Qaeda_operative> [accessed 3 December 2010].

¹⁶ On the Rumsfeld memo see: Philippe Sands, *Torture Team: Rumsfeld’s Memo and the Betrayal of American Values* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

torture include being hooded, drugged, beaten, spat upon and sexually assaulted—including repeated acts of anal penetration with objects.¹⁷

Hicks had been held at Guantánamo Bay until 2007, at which time he was the first person convicted under the United States' Military Commissions Act 2006. Returned to Australia after his conviction, Hicks was then required to serve another nine months in prison, being released on December 29, 2007. Commentators have made much of the fact that the nine month period of imprisonment in Australia meant, perhaps conveniently, that Hicks was unable to speak to the media until after the 2007 Australian election.

At the same time, the popular Fox Network in the United States of America was broadcasting a fictional television series about the 'Counter Terrorism Unit' in Los Angeles. The chief protagonist within the show was Jack Bauer, played by Kiefer Sutherland, who tended then to ignore the morality of his actions in an 'ends justifies the means' approach to combating perceived terrorists. In many situations the character, Jack Bauer, employed excessive violence and torture as methods to achieve his goals, and it has been generally suggested that the series may have in some ways been supportive (through sympathetic plots for the same actions) of the Bush administration's policies on extraordinary rendition and torture. Created by Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran, the series was immensely popular (winning both Golden Globe and Emmy awards) and ran for a total of eight seasons—as the longest running espionage-themed television series.

The internet, however, has been the site of much passionate debate about Guantánamo Bay and about its treatment of captives. While countless cases of people condemning torture and extraordinary rendition can be cited, there are also a considerable number of people advocating for the policies of the Bush administration. In one case that stands out YouTube videos were released by a user named 'PropagandaBuster' arguing that Guantánamo Bay was little more than a Caribbean holiday resort.¹⁸

Whilst torture has been part of American interrogation techniques for some time—with well documented cases existing from such similar (propagandistic) conflicts such as Vietnam, and relating to incidents such as the 1983 bombing of Marine barracks in Lebanon, the present writer would argue that—due to shifts in the power, role and effectiveness of the mass media, and changes in societal values—those cases were not the

¹⁷ See "'New evidence' backs Hicks' torture claim', *ABC News Online* (31 October 2005). <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200510/s1494779.htm>> [accessed 6 December 2010].

¹⁸ PropagandaBuster, 'Guantanamo Bay a Caribbean vacation resort for terrorist', *YouTube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmubplfILO8>> [accessed 6 December 2010].

subject of such wide debate—and did not infiltrate either popular culture or folk consciousness as deeply.¹⁹

Crippling Emotions

‘She walked
Through bullets and haze
I asked her to stop
I begged her to stay
But she pressed on
So I lifted my gun and I fired away [...]
She collapsed with a flag in her hand
A flag white as snow’.²⁰

Much like the unnamed soldier in Rise Against’s song, *Hero of War*, American infantry scout Jesus Bocanegra, who was part of the chase for Saddam Hussein in Tikrit (Iraq), who suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after returning from active duty—taking some six months to find employment upon returning home. Bocanegra explained:

I had real bad flashbacks. I couldn’t control them,’ Bocanegra, 23, says. ‘I saw the murder of children, women. It was just horrible for anyone to experience.’ Bocanegra recalls calling in Apache helicopter strikes on a house by the Tigris River where he had seen crates of enemy ammunition carried in. When the gunfire ended, there was silence. But then children’s cries and screams drifted from the destroyed home, he says. “I didn’t know there were kids there,” he says. Those screams are the most horrible thing you can hear.²¹

Marine Corporal Sean Huze explained the ongoing stress and fear faced by soldiers involved with the War on Terror, pointing out that ‘there is no ‘front’, ... you go back to the rear, at the Army base in Mosul, and you go in to get your chow, and the chow hall blows up.’²²

Also in keeping with the story of our unnamed soldier from *Hero of War*, the widespread level of unease and fear—as articulated above by Corporal Sean Huze—has been linked to the practice of shooting (to kill) anyone, or anything, that either approached military checkpoints too fast, or came too close to them, without permission. General Stanley A. McChrystal—the senior American and NATO commander in Afghanistan—commented on the practice in *The New York Times*,

¹⁹ On past cases of the United States of America using torture see: Mark Bowden, ‘The Dark Art of Interrogation’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 292:3 (October 2003), 51-76.

²⁰ Rise Against, ‘Hero of War’.

²¹ Welch, William M., ‘Trauma of Iraq War haunting thousands returning home’, *USA Today* (28 February 2005) <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-02-28-cover-iraq-injuries_x.htm> [accessed 2 December 2010].

²² Huze, Sean, *Ibid.*

revealing that troops ‘have shot an amazing number of people [under those circumstances], but to my knowledge, none has ever proven to be a threat’.²³ This scenario has come to feature heavily in contemporary soldier stories associated with the War on Terror, most likely due to the ongoing psychological damage it could cause those commanded to kill innocent people—through the same soldiers’ grief and deep guilt. It is also an aspect of the war effort that has been used with great effect in media reports designed to promote anti-American sentiments within the Middle East. A particularly well-reported case was USA soldiers shooting into a loaded passenger bus in Kabul, killing five and wounding eighteen. This led to local citizens building roadblocks out of burning tyres whilst chanting ‘Death to America!’²⁴

Coupled with those facts we must consider the research that has been done into the emotional states of soldiers who participated in the conflicts. In 2004, of a group of 300,000 surveyed, 2,411 reported suicidal thoughts, and over half were very scared of dying in the conflict.²⁵ No doubt, as with other wars before this one, those mental states will have played a large role in shaping new, or adjusted, self-images for the soldiers involved. This obviously feeds through to our popular culture memorable and disturbing depictions of soldiers involved with the War on Terror—through the transmission of news reports and individuals telling their tales into the constructed historical fiction accounts.

Those emotional responses are linked closely to the horrific injuries that soldiers are returning home to the United States of America having endured. Many commentators and journalists, such as William M. Walsh of *USA Today*, have noted after discussing the returned veterans with health professionals that they are returning with injuries that are largely more severe than those that were seen from prior wars.²⁶ This is arguably the case as our ability—as a collective western society, to save lives has improved—and thus soldiers are returning with severe physical injuries such as multiple amputations in greater numbers.

²³ McChrystal, General Stanley A., in Richard A. Oppel Jr., ‘Tighter Rules Fail to Stem Deaths of Innocent Afghans at Checkpoints’, *The New York Times* (26 March 2010). <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/world/asia/27afghan.html?_r=1> [accessed 2 December 2010].

²⁴ See Richard A. Oppel Jr., ‘Civilians Killed as US Troops Fire on Afghan Bus’, *The New York Times* (12 April 2010) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/13/world/asia/13afghan.html>> [accessed 2 December 2010].

²⁵ See Christian Nordqvist, ‘One third of Iraq veterans with mental health problems’, *Medical News Today*, 1 March 2006, <<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/38658.php>> [accessed 1 December 2010].

²⁶ See William M. Walsh, ‘Iraq Injuries differ from past wars: More amputations, brain traumas’, *USA Today* (28 February 2005) <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-02-28-cover-side_x.htm> [accessed 2 December 2010].

Humiliation, Torture and Shame

They took off his clothes
 They pissed in his hands
 I told them to stop
 But then I joined in
 We beat him with guns
 And batons not just once
 But again and again.²⁷

Echoing the shame expressed in *Hero of War* regarding participating in torture, in 2004 the world was confronted with reports of torture, sexual abuse and homicide being conducted by soldiers from the United States of America in conjunction with—as evidence suggests, and most likely—the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) involved in assault upon prisoners that they had detained in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq as part of the War on Terror.²⁸

The world became aware of the events at Abu Ghraib when photographs of the systemic humiliation and torture of prisoners were circulated, including images such as one of Army Reserve clerk, Private Lynndie England leading an Iraqi prisoner on a leash as he was forced to slither and crawl along the ground behind her, of a naked male prisoner with female panties over his face being restrained by bound hands and left in a torturous position known as ‘Palestinian Hanging’, or even of pyramids of naked men and these men being forced into positions that simulate sexual acts. In one particular shocking picture Army Spc. Sabrina Harman, of the 372nd Military Police Company, posed smiling and giving a ‘thumbs up’ signal as she leaned over the body of the captured Iraqi Manadel al-Jamadi—who had his eyes covered with patches of some kind, and his entire body covered in bags of ice whilst being restrained within a black plastic sheet like looking material. Notably Manadel al-Jamadi had been captured by SEALs in November 2003, and died a few hours later under CIA interrogation in an Abu Ghraib shower.²⁹

The scandal of Abu Ghraib intensified when *Time Magazine* reported that torture was not the only ill being performed on prisoners within the facility, but that there were also ‘amputations performed by nondoctors, chest tubes recycled from the dead to the living, a medic ordered, by one

²⁷ Rise Against, ‘Hero of War’.

²⁸ On the links of these actions to the CIA see: Michael Ssherer and Mark Benjamin, ‘Abu Gharib: Other Government Agencies’, in *Salon*, March 14, 2006, <http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/chapter_5/index.html> [accessed 1 December 2010].

²⁹ The image of Manadel al-Jamadi described above can be viewed in: Seth Hettena, ‘Iraqi died while hung from wrists’, CommonDreams.org (Associated Press, 17 February 2005) <<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0217-09.htm>> [accessed 3 December 2010].

account, to cover up a homicide' and a raft of other issues.³⁰ As a backdrop to those events the facility was coming under shelling and light arms fire by insurgents at night.

Several soldiers involved with, or witnessing, abuse of prisoners and torture at Abu Ghraib have expressed not only a deep level of shame, but also being psychologically damaged by the experiences themselves, since returning home. Military intelligence Spc. Armin Cruz, who pleaded guilty and was convicted of detainee abuse, declared that he has 'nightmares very often and wake up screaming. It is not uncommon for me to wake up on the ground with my hands over my head.'³¹ Ken Davis, an MP who witnessed the tortures of Abu Ghraib, returned home claiming of the events that,

it's sickening, ... I will do everything in my power first hand to make sure my children never join this military of ours, as long as we have this state of mind.'³²

Following the publication of leaked secret documents on the WikiLeaks website, representatives of the United Nations even took action to hint as to the impact on Human Rights that the War on Terror has had. Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights voiced his 'concerns that serious breaches of international human rights law have occurred in Iraq' and urged the United States and Iraq to investigate the allegations brought to light through WikiLeaks and bring those responsible to justice.'³³

When considering the shame that these events, and other similar cases, brought to military personnel involved in the War on Terror the present writer can not help but also remember the tales—told by men he knows amongst many other veterans—of returning home from the Vietnam War, only to be spat upon due to media reports of the atrocities committed there.

Anti-war notions were ever present for the Iraq section of the War on Terror, with large-scale protests in a large number of countries, including by several allies of the United States of America. There was also considerable public opposition to the invasion both during the planning

³⁰ Zagorin, Adam, 'The Abu Graib Scandal you don't know', *Time Magazine* (7 February 2005) <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1025139-1,00.html>> [accessed 3 December 2010].

³¹ Cruz, Armin, in *Inside Abu Gharib: A few bad apples* (CBC-TV, aired on 16 November 2005, 9pm).

³² Davis, Ken, in *Ibid.*

³³ Pillay, Navi, in 'UN urges WikiLeaks torture probe', *Al Jazeera* (27 October 2010) <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2010/10/2010102701156746961.html>> [accessed 2 December 2010].

stage and the conflict within the United States—with support for the war only at a rate of ‘nearly six in ten’ Americans.³⁴

In Sum: Using the Lens of the Social Anthropologist

And the ANZAC legends didn’t mention mud and blood and tears
And the stories that my father told me never seemed quite real [...]

And can you tell me doctor why I still can’t get to sleep
And why the Channel Seven chopper chills me to my feet
And what’s this rash that comes and goes
Can you tell me what it means?
God help me... I was only nineteen.³⁵

The reality for returned servicemen from the War on Terror has been shown to be not very far from the fictional depictions in popular culture texts such as *Hero of War*, with

nearly one out of three [American] service members [who served in this conflict] reported a mental health problem, including depression and ... Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or symptoms of traumatic brain injury, only half of those actually sought help.³⁶

Notably, there were similar echoes within the Australian folk consciousness following the Vietnam War (which was, arguably, also American-led). The popular folk-rock track *I was Only Nineteen* (which peaked at number one in the National Singles Chart) presented the image of a man who had returned from the conflict in Vietnam with severe mental health issues, and possibly also suffering from an exposure to Agent Orange that he had endured while in service.³⁷ Like the above quoted song, *Hero of War* (which deals with the War on Terror), *I was Only Nineteen* presents a hauntingly real account of a serviceman and the anguish, pain and internal strife suffered after returning home from the conflict. John Schumann, who wrote *I was Only Nineteen*, explained—when discussing the track’s lyrics—that ‘the power derives from the detail, provided by my mate and brother-in-law, Mick Storen, who was

³⁴ Benedetto, Richard, ‘Poll: Most back war but want UN support’, *USA Today* (16 March 2003). <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-03-16-poll-iraq_x.htm> [accessed 1 December 2010].

³⁵ Redgum, *I was Only Nineteen*, written by John Schumann (Epic CBS, 1983). This was released as a single. It also appeared on the record *Caught in the Act*.

³⁶ Cahn, Dori, ‘An Uphill Battle: A Soldier’s Mental Health’, *International Examiner*, 36.24 (2009), <<http://www.iexaminer.org/news/features/uphill-battle-soldiers-mental-health/>> [accessed 1 December 2010]. On this topic see also Christian Nordqvist, ‘One third of Iraq veterans with mental health problems’.

³⁷ Redgum, *I was Only Nineteen*.

brave and trusting enough to share his story with me'.³⁸ Mick Storen was a veteran.

Popular culture texts had also already contributed to the perception of Guantánamo Bay before it was used as a detention facility with texts such as the 1992 Hollywood blockbuster, *A Few Good Men*.³⁹ Set at the Guantánamo Bay naval Base, that film had presented a courtroom drama dealing with Marines who murdered one of their peers in the process of following brutal 'standard practices' for discipline.

And the Unsafe Region

The geographical setting for the War on Terror has also been charged, in terms of public opinion, through ongoing media reports of the Middle East as an unsafe region through ongoing cycles of conflicts, such as: the First Intifada (1987-1993), the Gulf War (1990-1991), the Second Intifada (2000-2005), the Lebanon War (2006), the Gaza War (2008-2009). Coupled with these conflicts, we should also not forget specific incidents such as the 1983 Beirut Barracks Bombing or the 1988 Lockerbie disaster for Pan Am Flight 103, which has been loosely attributed (though not conclusively) to a group known as the Guardians of the Islamic Republic, and acting in response to the United States shooting down Iran Air's Flight 655 in the Persian Gulf during the previous year.

Western societies have also viewed some elements of Middle Eastern societies as brutal in recent years with a great deal of publicity being given to events such as the release of the graphic account of stoning as a form of execution in Iran—in the true story *La Femme Lapidée* (written by Freidoune Sahebjam and published in 1990) and then translated and released in English. Notably *La Femme Lapidée* was also turned into an award winning motion picture, that stressed visions of a low-tech and brutal environment, called *The Stoning of Soraya M.* The motion picture focussed tightly upon harsh lifestyles, gave prolonged graphic depictions of a brutal execution, and was driven by its purpose of exploring a corrupt justice system.⁴⁰ Controversy was also fuelled during the period over the Islamic Shia religious rituals where participants cut themselves to draw blood—perhaps even demonizing some aspects of that faith.

The War on Terror has, however, arguably marked a significant shift in the depiction of the military, away from simply a vision of brave heroes that we saw in the treatment of World War II, and moving ever more and more towards real men and women struggling with the

³⁸ Schumann, John, in Redgum, *Against the Grain* (Sony Music, 2004). This quote appeared on the cover insert.

³⁹ *A Few Good Men*, directed by Rob Reiner (Columbia Pictures, 1992).

⁴⁰ *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh (Roadside Attractions, 2008).

emotional consequences of duties that they have been required to perform, and at times tainted by abhorrent practices such as torture—that we saw emerging in texts about the Vietnam War (both at the time of the Vietnam War and since it,) including movies such as Oliver Stone’s trilogy: *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and *Heaven & Earth*.⁴¹ Echoing the stories told by Vietnam veterans and perhaps foreshadowing the events that would be repeated in the War on Terror, *Platoon* includes scenes depicting American military personnel threatening, beating and killing Vietnamese citizens—including humiliating a man by shooting at the ground by his foot to force him to ‘dance’.

Born on the Fourth of July delved into several themes covered in this present article—considering the emotional and physical state of a returned serviceman after a war that included unseemly treatment of civilians and combatants. It told the story of Vietnam War veteran Ron Kovic—who had struggled desperately to reintegrate with society after returning home from Vietnam in a wheelchair due to combat injuries. He suffered, arguably, from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and tried to deal with his unit having massacred an entire village of innocent Vietnamese citizens who they mistakenly thought to be enemy combatants. In contrast to this, *Heaven & Earth* tells the story of Vietnamese villager Le Ly Hayslip—a young girl who was abducted and tortured by the South Vietnamese forces and then later raped by the Viet Cong forces as a suspected traitor—also tapping into themes of degradation very similar to those explored here.

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The huge number of people involved with the international War on Terror must also be seen as a defining point within the social and emotional history and make-up of a generation. Perhaps playing on that idea HBO released a series based upon the Iraq leg of recent wars titled *Generation Kill*—perhaps to some extent playing on the notion that the War on Terror really has touched that many people’s lives. For a great number of those who have been touched by it, the effects are long lasting—and there is very little real relief. And so Lieutenant Julian Goodrum explained that: ‘It just accumulated until it overwhelmed me. I was having a breakdown and trying to get assistance’.⁴²

This struggle seems far from over, however, with the recent WikiLeaks exposure of secret United States documents revealing that

⁴¹ *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone (Universal Pictures, 1987). *Born on the Fourth of July*, directed by Oliver Stone (Universal Pictures, 1989). *Heaven & Earth*, directed by Oliver Stone (Warner Brothers, 1993).

⁴² Goodrum, Julian, in William M. Welch, ‘Trauma of Iraq War haunting thousands returning home’.

Hillary Clinton had commented that ‘more needs to be done since Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban, LeT (an Islamist group in Pakistan) and other terrorist groups’.⁴³ However, the sometimes unsavoury events, that have formed a part of the struggle, and the repercussions of them upon the lives and folk memories of a large number of the present generation, are now a part of the cultural legacy and histories of western nations. We can not hide from them. As social scientists, we can—and must—simply begin to review the ways that they are shaping how our society interprets and constructs images of itself.

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**35th Annual Global Studies Conference
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⁴³ Clinton, Hillary, in Daniel Flitton and Rafael Epstein, '23 Australians named as terror suspects', *Stuff.co.nz*, repr. from the *Sydney Morning Herald* (7 December 2010). <<http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/australia/4430496/23-Australians-named-as-terror-suspects>> [accessed 7 December 2010].