

1. Introduction

Studies from around the world show that recovering from war—from any trauma—is heavily influenced by the society one belongs to, and there are societies that make that process relatively easy. Modern society does not seem to be one of them.¹

Time and again since the beginning of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, public discourse in the US has revolved around society's relationship with its soldiers. Apart from medialized farewell and welcome-home ceremonies, yellow-ribbon campaigns and "I-support-the-troops" bumper stickers, protagonists within this discourse have increasingly expressed concern about how soldiers come to terms with war experience. The public's obsession with war experience reveals a prominent discursive motif, a sense of crisis and anxiety about the state of civil-military relationships, as the psychosocial aftereffects of war, e.g., veterans' reintegration troubles and psychological injuries such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), permeate debates about US wars. These aftereffects are argued over in broad swaths of academic literature ranging from psychology to sociology, media studies, literary studies, and beyond. The debate about them fuels the nationwide proliferation of veterans' centers and programs at university campuses. They are central themes in countless self-help books written by and for veterans and their families, as well as mental-health specialists. Civic-activist projects and NGOs foster public discourse about these effects of war experience. They promote alternative therapies for psychological injury, engage in social work, and encourage veterans to share their experience with the public either in fiction, life writing, performance, or creative arts. Reinforcing this discursive phenomenon, droves of first-person narratives about post-9/11 wars in print memoirs and documentary films reflect this cultural anxiety about war experience. Perhaps most importantly, the integration of such firsthand narratives in the new media, be they blogs written from the war zone or conversations in soldiers' and veterans' private social media accounts, vastly expanded and intensified public discourse on war in the last two decades. All these practices

1 Junger, *Tribe*, 90.

manifest US society's urge to make sense of its contemporary wars and to (re)negotiate its relationship with those who fight them.

Yet, public discourse on war experience also reveals the historical roots of this sense of crisis in US society. To a large extent, it is tied to the Vietnam War, to how this conflict has since been commemorated, and to how constructions of collective memory helped shape US foreign and domestic politics. The ongoing discourse on war experience since Vietnam also affected the US military's culture, its social and institutional structure, and society's relationship with the military in general. The Vietnam War provoked domestic strife while it lasted, and debates have raged ever since over its political justification, its results, its legacy, and its morality.² Vietnam also brought war trauma to the public's attention. The war produced thousands of cases of psychological injuries that afflict veterans' lives as well as their social environments. Owing to public attention and to the gnawing perception of war trauma as a relevant social problem, activist psychologists of the Vietnam era campaigned to develop and define a diagnostic assessment for PTSD which, since its official designation in 1980, has in turn created more controversy over war trauma, its diagnostic parameters, and appropriate therapy methods since then.³

In the American cultural imagination of the Vietnam War, fueled by countless films, novels, and memoirs, US society at large bears responsibility for veterans' psychological afflictions. Regardless of political affiliation, various perspectives have contributed to this notion of social responsibility, be it the allegation that the US government sent its citizens into an unnecessary and unjust war, or that the antiwar movement at home caused the military defeat overseas, or that (all of) civil society unjustly blamed the returning soldiers for the war's ills, that it abandoned them, and thus compounded their trauma.⁴ While public protestations of support for the troops at the start of the post-9/11 wars insisted that the country would not abandon the troops again, the legacy of Vietnam once more cast a shadow both because large segments of US society questioned the validity of the cause for the invasion of Iraq, and because Afghanistan and

2 Cf., among others, Hagopian, *Vietnam War*; Kieran, *Forever Vietnam*; Gardner and Young, *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, or, How Not to Learn from the Past*; Good et al., *Mythologizing the Vietnam War*; Wood, *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War*; Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*.

3 Cf. Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 49–78; Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*.

4 Leikauf, "Welcome to My Bunker," 76–90. In this context, see also Leikauf's observations on the narrowed subjectivity in these imaginings, that is, the reduction to exclusively US, white, male, combat infantry perspectives of Vietnam. Leikauf, 115, 353–54, 375.

Iraq, having quickly turned into similarly indecisive quagmires like Vietnam, produced equally horrendous numbers of moral dilemmas and psychological casualties among US soldiers. The post-9/11 wars, then, although they did not generate nearly as much domestic strife or as many US casualties as Vietnam, drove the public to draw parallels to that earlier war and, as a result, voice anxieties over the well-being of US soldiers and veterans. Influenced by the cultural imagination of Vietnam, activists feared that the new wars might reproduce traumatization and reintegration troubles—especially since the increasing social segregation between civil society and members of the military suggests civilian neglect⁵—and that US society might once more ‘abandon’ the soldiers, that is, fail to uphold its responsibilities for the soldiers sent to war on its behalf.

Because the anxiety about war experience and trauma during the post-9/11 wars is shaped by the ongoing discourse on civil-military relationships since the 1970s, it appears that US civil society has renewed its efforts at scrutinizing, renegotiating, and reaffirming these relationships since the early 2000s. In this context, it is not surprising that Ken Burns’ and Lynn Novick’s 2017 documentary series on Vietnam helped rekindle the public debate about contemporary domestic struggles and US civil-military relations and that Vietnam-era veteran writers, such as Tim O’Brien and Karl Marlantes, feature prominently in the series.⁶ This rekindled debate on war experience manifests itself in diverse political perspectives and ideas, cultural practices, and media, pointing to the mutual responsibilities of the civil-military social contract. It rests on a self-reflective public exchange involving soldiers, veterans, and members of civil society to promote a medialized cycle of narrating personal war experiences and civilian responses to renegotiate civil-military relationships. These practices argue that coming to terms with individual experiences necessitates coming to terms on a collective level. The script of narrating and acknowledging war experience in these practices serves to reassert the social contract, to pledge support, and to construct ceremonial frames for these negotiations.

This book expands previous approaches to firsthand war narratives and carves out a new field of intercultural and interdisciplinary knowledge production by anchoring its methodological perspectives in these cultural practices’ ceremonial frames. It will investigate how public discourse during the post-9/11 wars addresses personal war experience and its potential psychological effects, and how it constructs ritual scripts to interweave the making of individual and

5 Cf. Thompson, “The Other 1 %.”

6 *The Vietnam War*.

collective meaning. It will employ a cultural-studies framework for its multi-disciplinary approach, integrating questions, concepts, and techniques from related fields such as cultural anthropology, cultural history, literary studies, ritual studies, (new) media studies, narratology, performance studies, and veteran studies, to pinpoint the production of knowledge within this discourse. Focusing on the sense of crisis in these negotiations of war experience, this study will draw its primary sources from three major sets of texts and practices. Firstly, an analysis of activist texts in psychology, social work, and veterans' self-help elucidates how cultural pessimism fuels a desire for cross-cultural role models in constructions of war-related social therapy. This comparative approach will then be applied to the other sources, reading, secondly, 'milblogs' written by deployed soldiers and 'homecoming scenarios' (narrative rituals of veteran reintegration) as ceremonial negotiations of war experience and of civil-military relationships between soldiers, veterans, and civilian audiences.

The epistemological purpose of this study draws on activists' discursive practices about war experience particularly because their invocations of therapy determine their cultural work and their social significance: they treat war experience as a social concern and, thus, diagnose psychological war injuries as social and cultural problems, rather than as individual afflictions. Consequently, they argue that cultural comparison with and role modeling of the community-oriented warrior traditions of some non-'Western' cultures offer solutions, and that rituals and narratives are key components therein. Their focus on ritual and narrative not only helps disseminate creative mental-health therapies for veterans. It also self-reflectively invokes the therapeutic attributes inherent in civil-military discourse itself. That is, activists promote firsthand war narratives as social-therapy vehicles to facilitate healing through a public, ritualized conversation on war experience among soldiers, veterans, and civil society. My study applies this perspective to its analysis of milblogs and veterans' storytelling projects, reading them as narrative rituals whose cultural and social relevance revolves around the ongoing discourse on war experience, on civil-military relationships, and on social therapy.

This book, thus, explores how activist transcultural references to war-related traditions illustrate the activists' cultural criticism and elucidate the ceremonial framework in negotiations of war experience, trauma, and civil-military relationships in US society since Vietnam. Where their discourse portrays psychological injuries as a social ill, the outline of modern US society at large comes under critical scrutiny.⁷ Activists frequently contrast Indigenous, particularly

7 One example of an overall criticism of contemporary 'Western' society's negative effects on the social fabric is Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. While not explicitly

Native North American, community-oriented war traditions against the assumption that overt individualism and competition in US society have caused widespread isolation and alienation, compounding psychological problems among veterans.⁸ To illustrate the cultural-pessimist impulse in the ceremonial framework of activist discourse with an example, consider acclaimed war journalist Sebastian Junger.⁹ In his 2016 nonfiction book *Tribe*, Junger portrays “post-traumatic stress [as] a medical term for a cultural problem”¹⁰, i.e., he attributes US veterans’ shock, their sense of loss, of alienation, and the social problems around war experience to a lack of communality, of social responsibility, and of mutual aid in US society. As he argues, facing extreme danger, violence, and suffering requires people to support and rely upon each other for survival. Among soldiers, this experience results in tight personal bonds that are sorely missed once they return to a civil society grounded in competition and individualism. Junger observes that Indigenous societies have developed ceremonial practices to preserve and transform these bonds and mutual obligations for support between warriors and their communities so that communities can absorb the warriors’ shock and memories of violence. He concludes in the above motto that modern ‘Western’ society lacks these social mechanisms. His book proposes to reorient US society toward what he understands as “tribal way[s]”¹¹, to closer social bonds, to mutual aid and responsibilities in order to remedy many of the social and psychological problems veterans face today.¹²

addressing war experience, it represents a form of cultural anxiety that leads civic activists discussed in the present study to emulate community-oriented practices of other cultures to remedy their own society’s perceived malfunctions.

- 8 As the final chapter discusses, references to other cultures, such as ancient Greece or to the Samurai culture of Japan, are also popular. Cf. Morie, Haynes, and Chance, “Warriors’ Journey”; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 220.
- 9 He and co-producer Tim Hetherington won international recognition with the documentary film *Restrepo*, filmed during an embedded tour with a US unit in Afghanistan.
- 10 Crawford, “Sebastian Junger’s ‘Tribe.’”
- 11 Junger, *Tribe*, 131.
- 12 While many reviewers praise Junger’s sociocultural perspective on war-related stress, others reject his ideas vehemently. Some critics, arguing that the book amounts to “yet another primitivism fantasy” (Marlowe), seem to take issue with Junger’s notion of tribal life. Since public debates often misunderstand and overgeneralize ‘tribalism’ by charging the term with ethnocentric and colonialist notions of savagery, it would go beyond the scope of this study to analyze the book’s merits and shortcomings in detail in this respect. However, the fact that Junger is so widely discussed illustrates the appeal of the discourse. The following chapter critically engages additional examples

My study will employ Indigenous traditions as an analytic lens, factoring in how activists utilize cultural comparison and transfer to create, negotiate, and disseminate knowledge: I argue that an analysis of activist references to and role-modeling of Indigenous war-related ceremonies serves, in turn, to understand milblogs and homecoming scenarios as civic rituals, regardless of whether they actually invoke Native American traditions to make their point. By perceiving milblogs and homecoming scenarios through the lens of Indigenous traditions, this study reveals functional equivalencies among Indigenous and non-Native cultural contexts that would otherwise not become apparent. This analytic lens, thus, opens up an avenue to glean nuances and complexity in the cultural work of these non-Native war-related practices.

Applying this analytic lens of Indigenous war-related traditions to milblogs and homecoming scenarios, I understand them as forms of ‘ceremonial storytelling,’ as ritualized practices of relationship-building and mutual rapprochement among US soldiers, veterans, and civilians. As Indigenous warriors narrate their war experience, their communities respond by acknowledging this experience (including hardships, suffering, and loss), expressing gratitude, and pledging to uphold their responsibility to reintegrate the survivors into community life and to tend to their well-being. In their respective cultural contexts, milblogs and homecoming scenarios feature similar discursive functions. On an abstract level, then, both Native and non-Native practices symbolically reaffirm the social contract between their respective societies and members of the military. The symbolic exchange of narrating and acknowledging experience negotiates citizenship and group cohesion (i.e., cultural, national identity) and, if necessary, addresses emotional distress, in a public setting. It is this abstract understanding that social and academic activists seek to transfer into the non-Native discourse on war and that this study observes in milblogs and homecoming scenarios.

To do justice to the complexity of this topic and to the diversity of the source corpus, my cultural-comparative perspective integrates methodological approaches and concepts from a number of disciplines. While several are addressed in detail in the chapters below to apply specific analytic perspectives to different source types,¹³ I discuss some methodological approaches in the

in more detail to highlight how activist cultural-comparative perspectives influence public perceptions of and discourses about contemporary first-person war narratives.

13 Chapter Three applies methodology from ritual studies and media studies to pinpoint processes of ritualization in milblog communication. Chapter Four applies cognitive and developmental psychology and Native American studies concepts to investigate

following subsections to explain this study's working concept and situate it in related academic traditions. First, I outline the interdisciplinary background for my approach to narrative and ritual in the reading of ceremonial storytelling among milblogs and homecoming scenarios. Second, I focus on the specific mediality and textuality of milblogs and homecoming scenarios to examine their embeddedness in the tradition of US firsthand war narratives. Third, I briefly discuss milblogs as source types from a cultural-history perspective to highlight the 2000s as a unique moment in the historical development of war writing owing to major transitions in communications technology and cultural practices of media use and to illustrate the resulting selection of my milblog sample, before outlining the chapter structure for the readings.

Ritual, Narrative, and War: Disciplinary and Methodological Approaches

Situated in American studies, this project opens up productive interfaces of cultural studies, literary studies, cultural anthropology, cultural history, ritual studies, (new) media studies, and performance studies. It further expands the interdisciplinary traditions of the field, drawing on the social sciences and psychology. Its approach aligns American studies with the focus on culture and on social topics in the field of new military history, as well as the emerging transdisciplinary veterans studies. Perceiving milblogs and homecoming scenarios through the comparative lens of Indigenous war rituals, my project grasps them as cultural practices, as sets of events and texts anchored around ritualized narrative negotiations of war experience, expressed and promoted in diverse media and genres, and embedded in generic and cultural traditions. In short, it observes practices of 'ceremonial storytelling' about war experience whose cultural work lies in constructing, negotiating, and asserting collective identity and civil-military relationships. In doing so, this book also expands earlier scholarship on these practices that, until now, have mainly addressed particular, individual practices or text types, and explored specific, narrow disciplinary foci in literary and cultural studies, (new) media studies, or sociology.

This section serves to explain how my approach integrates methods, questions, and concepts from the above disciplines to interpret the cultural work

how milblogs process experience and mend social relationships. Finally, Chapter Five delves into performance studies to address ritualization and theatricality in veterans' civic projects.

of my sources. It will specifically introduce disciplinary influences on my conceptualization of narrative and ritual from literary and cultural studies, media studies, and ritual studies, and discuss parameters informing the book's cultural-comparative approach and its analytic lens of Indigenous war-related traditions through cultural anthropology and Native American studies.

My project draws on literary studies both regarding its subject matter and its methodology. US literature has (con)textualized war experience from the beginning; this book elucidates how blogs and homecoming scenarios write forth this tradition by mediating between society, veterans, and the military with the technological opportunities of the twenty-first century. My approach shares its interest in typical themes of war experience with traditional war fiction, such as suffering, loss, cognitive dissonance and shock, trauma, soldiers' liminality, and the postulation of an experiential gap between returning veterans and their communities. These issues pervade traditional war fiction and poetry and have repeatedly been discussed in literary scholarship.¹⁴ Veteran writers, such as Ambrose Bierce, Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Heller, and Tim O'Brien have contributed classic works to war literature and frequently shaped scholarship on war narratives.¹⁵ Literary studies have also generated an extensive body of scholarship on war-related autobiography and life writing, including the study of war letters, memoirs, and diaries.¹⁶ In the wake of the post-9/11 wars, vast numbers of memoirs have been published and are currently popular subjects of rapidly expanding literary scholarship.¹⁷

This book, thus, draws a major methodological impulse from literary studies, expressing how contemporary discourse on war experience is embedded in these literary traditions. It discusses in how far activists invoke the literary classics to

14 Cf., among many others, Masur, *Real War*; Limon, *Writing After War*; Jason, *Fourteen Landing Zones*; Anderson, *Aftermath*. My thanks to Anne Koenen for bringing these works to my attention, as well as for her invaluable comments and suggestions. The post-9/11 wars, in turn, have already produced a wide range of fictitious accounts and scholarship, e.g., Bonenberger and Castner, *The Road Ahead*; Gallagher and Scranton, *Fire and Forget*; Martin et al., *The Journal of Military Experience*.

15 Bierce, *Occurrence*; Hemingway, *Farewell*; Heller, *Catch-22*; O'Brien, *Things*.

16 Cf., e.g., Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*; Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*; Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*; Carroll, *War Letters*.

17 In German American studies alone, several dissertation theses and articles on post-9/11 war life writing were published in recent years, and more are in preparation, cf. Schwär, *Storyfying War*; Günther, *War Experience*; Spychala, "Military Femininities." The final chapter details a selection of US publications and social-work projects in this context.

promote war narratives as vehicles of negotiation and healing within the discourse, self-consciously reflecting on the cultural work and social relevance of their own storytelling practices.¹⁸ Academic traditions, e.g., methodologies for the analysis of first-person writing, serve to contextualize current war narratives. Finally, literary studies shape the general methodological outline of this study because its analysis of activist scholarship and nonfiction, of milblogs, and of homecoming scenarios, treats these sources as literary texts and carves out their cultural work in close readings.

My analysis involves classics in war narratives to elucidate how earlier representations of war experience helped shape the cultural imagination of war among contemporary firsthand authors. Cultural studies—particularly film studies—offer productive contextualization in this regard. Some of the earliest events captured on film depicted war, and Hollywood has shaped the perception of what war supposedly looks and feels like, not only for civilians but also for generations of US soldiers who had to question their preconceived notions of war once they were confronted with its reality.¹⁹ Studies of visual representations of war illustrate the allure, spectacle, and persistence of war-related imagery. As the chapter readings demonstrate, contemporary soldiers frequently contrast their own experience with these cultural images.

Cultural studies are central to this project because they provide and open up the interfaces on which my interdisciplinary approach relies. The book's focus on the cultural work conducted within the discourse on war experience, its interest in how cultural practices negotiate social problems and relationships, applies cultural-studies perspectives to related fields: Cultural history provides the major concepts of experience, memory, and identity construction. Media studies explain how technology determines the specific textuality of communicative practices which, in turn, shape a community's social cohesion. Ritual studies contribute perspectives on how formalized communication self-consciously performs and asserts this social cohesion.

Since the current discourse on war experience emerged from historical discursive traditions, particularly those related to Vietnam, this book integrates concepts and approaches in cultural history. Historians in the US and Europe

18 The final chapter, e.g., discusses the project "Operation Homecoming," sponsored by the National Endowment of the Arts, as a life writing project among contemporary soldiers in the tradition of the classics.

19 Cf. Geiger, "Taking Aim," 156–57; Westwell, *War Cinema*, 1; Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 29–30.

turned to the study of war experience in force during the 1980s as part of a longer development of a “history of war from below”²⁰ that extended its focus beyond social structures to include observations on how people’s everyday activities and behavior were shaped by specific social conditions and cultural processes. Emerging as a new field, the cultural history of war sought to grasp war experience as a process driven by interrelated determining factors. Established in the 1990s in Tübingen, Germany, the collaborative research center on war experience (SFB 437) concludes: “Experience of war includes the actions and immediate perceptions of those who were present during the battle, but it also goes further. The term experience emphasizes the multiple and often contradictory effects of wars on individuals and societies.”²¹ The center’s researchers describe the reality of war as a “perpetual process of social communication in which perception, interpretation, and action relate to each other.”²² The study of war experience, then, not only asks how soldiers perceive battle, but it also investigates how cultural representations of earlier wars shaped soldiers’ expectations about war, how these expectations inform a state’s justifications and explanations for war, how soldiers remember and relate their firsthand experience to their families and communities, how individuals, communities and the general public interpret the meaning of these events and, eventually, how these public exchanges in turn influence the social structures, attitudes, and behavior of future generations.²³ In accordance with this complex, process-oriented cultural-history perspective on war experience, my approach to firsthand representations of the post-9/11 wars considers the debates and cultural practices related to the Vietnam War and its aftermath as a necessary precursor to understand current social structures and practices of meaning-making related to war, and it sets representations of individual experience in relation to patterns and themes of the broader public debate on war today.

Emanating from these premises, this study makes operable the diverse interrelations of cultural history with other disciplines, particularly regarding memory and identity. Early new media studies draw on classics, such as

20 Doering-Manteuffel, “Die Erfahrungsgeschichte des Krieges und neue Herausforderungen. Thesen zur Verschränkung von Zeitgeschehen und historischer Problemwahrnehmung,” 275, 277.

21 Schild, introduction to *The American Experience of War*, 9.

22 Beyrau, Hochgeschwender, and Langewiesche, “Einführung: zur Klassifikation von Kriegen,” 10.

23 Schild, introduction to *The American Experience of War*, 10; Beyrau, Hochgeschwender, and Langewiesche, “Einführung,” 10; Doering-Manteuffel, “Erfahrungsgeschichte,” 279.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, to explain identity construction and social cohesion in online cultural practices, which informs my perspective on the community-constituting attributes of milblogs.²⁴ I discuss constructions of collective memory²⁵ and war-related memorial culture²⁶ to interpret, e.g., conversations about death in milblogs as practices of a "virtual sepulchral culture."²⁷ In addition, the urgency of references to trauma in activist discourse since Vietnam will be a major focal point throughout the study. I integrate the close readings of activist texts with trauma scholarship to highlight how thoroughly historiography, cultural studies, and psychology are intertwined in their perspectives on trauma.²⁸ In this context, the following chapter also analyzes activist scholarship in psychology, illustrating their growing influence on the public discourse on war experience since Vietnam.²⁹

This project draws on media studies, particularly new media studies, to contextualize the mediality and specific textuality of its sources, as well as the actors driving the discourse. It utilizes previous studies' empirical and often quantitative approaches within this field (e.g., content analyses), as springboards to reflect on patterns of media use and social interaction, forming a foundation for close readings of the cultural work conducted in milblogs and homecoming scenarios.³⁰ Their work allows me to extend my perspective beyond literary and cultural studies which, apart from explicit reader-response approaches, usually do not include in their analysis the discourse among authors and their audiences, nor the wider public discussions about a particular text. Integrating (new) media-studies approaches emphasizes the role of communication through

24 Cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere: An Introduction to the Imagined Community of Instant Publishing"; Gurak et al., *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*.

25 Cf. Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*; Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity"; Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*.

26 Cf. Hagopian, *Vietnam War*; Doss, *Memorial Mania*; Savage, *Monument Wars*; Gessner, *Kollektive Erinnerung als Katharsis?*; Leikauf, "Welcome."

27 Leikauf, "Welcome," 200. This will be particularly relevant in the discussion of ritualization in milblogs in Chapter Three.

28 Cf. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*; Herman, Judith L., *Trauma and Recovery. The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*; Caplan, *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home*.

29 Cf. Tick, *War and the Soul*; Shay, *Achilles*; Scurfield and Platoni, *Healing War Trauma*.

30 Cf. Rettberg, *Blogging*; Gurak et al., *Into the Blogosphere*; Kaye and Tremayne, "Blog Use Motivations."

and about war narratives in my sources, and it expands the analysis to the level of social actors, e.g., to describe discourse among bloggers and their audience in comments in chapters Three and Four, or to explain the network of texts and actors in civic projects in Chapter Five. Cultural-studies inflections within new media studies, such as scholarship on fan communities in popular culture, helps conceptualize the discourse on war experience in my sources as practices constituting community,³¹ and they facilitate analyses of cumulative and collaborative texts, that is, of conversation threads among soldiers, veterans, and civilians.³²

The expanding field of ritual studies offers a major starting point for my cultural-comparative lens where it emphasizes the social and cultural functions of rituals rather than formal and structural attributes with a theological focus. It integrates the study of religion with cultural anthropology but, increasingly, also with sociology, cultural philosophy, and cultural studies. This disciplinary tradition goes back to Émile Durkheim who examined ritual's role in forging social cohesion.³³ Roy A. Rappaport interprets rituals as vehicles to negotiate and enact meaning and to assign morality to conventions, concluding that rituals thus not only represent, but actually constitute social contracts.³⁴ This understanding makes 'ritual' a particularly productive concept for a cultural-studies perspective as it underscores my emphasis on cultural work, that is, the production and affirmation of knowledge, values, and meaning—and, thus, of civil-military relationships and of the social contract—in my reading of war-related cultural practices.³⁵

This American-studies perspective on war-related discourse makes previous works in ritual studies productive not least because of their interest in the cultural functions of communication since the 1970s. Describing rituals, e.g., as a "culturally constructed system of symbolic communication,"³⁶ these expanded

31 Cf. Baym, *Tune in, Log On*; Booth, *Digital Fandom*.

32 The following subsection gives the integration of media-studies contexts in my cultural-studies framework more detailed attention.

33 Stausberg, "Reflexive Ritualisationen," 55–56.

34 Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 138.

35 Rappaport also addresses terminological arguments regarding 'ritual' and 'ceremony' within the discipline, questioning whether subtle structural contentions warrant a distinction between both terms pertaining to their social and cultural functions. Rappaport, *Ritual*, 38–39. As these disciplinary distinctions do not affect my more abstract and functional perspective on social cohesion and on the social contract, I follow Rappaport and use 'ritual' and 'ceremony' interchangeably.

36 Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," 128.

perspectives inform my reading of the exchange between soldiers, veterans and civilians as civic rituals. This is especially significant where they discuss features, such as conventionality and redundancy, to identify degrees of “ritualization”³⁷ in communicative practice. Their perspective of “symbolic communication” facilitates applications of ‘ritual’ outside of the immediate realm of religion and serves to integrate it with the cultural-studies paradigm of cultural work, particularly given the strong traditions of semiotics in cultural-studies methodology. Chapter Three further conceptualizes and dialogs ritual with ‘civil religion’ to situate the readings of milblogs and homecoming scenarios in prevalent methodologies in American studies and sociology.

Emphasizing the communicative aspects of enacting meaning in ritual also brings issues of storytelling to the fore; a reading of firsthand representations of war experience as rituals, thus, is suitable for methodological approaches to narrative. Of particular interest in this regard is the development of ‘postclassical narratology’ since the 1990s. The new period diverged from its ‘classical’ predecessor in expanding traditional research interests beyond the structure and formal attributes of fiction. It complemented text analysis with a focus on readers and contexts.³⁸ Notably, postclassical narratology became interested in the “world-making”³⁹ attributes and the politicality of narrative by situating narratives in their cultural contexts.⁴⁰ In the course of these developments, postclassical narratology diversified. It explored and integrated contexts, methodologies, and themes beyond literary studies, receiving methodological feedback from the expansion of narratological scholarship throughout the humanities, social sciences, and psychology, in the wake of the ‘Narrative Turn.’⁴¹

This diversification process fosters the synergistic interaction of ritual studies with narratology as both fields recognize overlap and potential to complement their respective methodologies and research questions. Joint projects posit “that narrative structures and the telling of stories play an important role in ritual

37 Tambiah, 128; Grimes, “Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction,” 13.

38 Alber and Fludernik, introduction to *Postclassical Narratology*, 3–6; Nünning, “Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term,” 243–44. Cf. Herman, David, “Introduction: Narratologies.”

39 Nünning and Rupp, “Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction,” 9.

40 Alber and Fludernik, introduction to *Postclassical Narratology*, 5–6; Ryan, introduction to *Narrative across Media*, 4–6. Cf. Bruner, “Self-Making and World-Making.”

41 Alber and Fludernik, Introduction to *Postclassical Narratology*, 3, 5; Herman, David, “Introduction: Narratologies.”

and ritual practice, just as ritual can be an important dimension of narrative.⁴² They identify a set of interfaces between narrative and ritual, of which, e.g., experientiality, performative power, the power to create and change worlds, and self-referentiality⁴³ are particularly significant for my analysis of the discourse on war experience. They foster the communicative production and negotiation of knowledge and values, and thus, of collective identity.

Diversification in narratological methodology shifted the field's focus to "natural-language data,"⁴⁴ that is, postclassical narratology not only explores narrative discourse within a single text, it also investigates how the social discourse represented in cumulative texts constructs an overall narrative. This is pertinent to discussions of new and, especially, social media where hypertext and communication threads among different people produce individual but interrelated text segments.⁴⁵ The subchapter below discusses how new media studies serve to interpret online cultural practices as collaborative and cumulative contributions to a narrative, how their performance of communal interaction determines ritualization, and how discourse on war experience and cultural contexts further ritualize narratives.

These methodological interfaces between narratology, ritual studies, and American cultural studies, then, mutually reinforce my reading of milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of 'ceremonial storytelling.' They help carve out how the representation of war experience in a firsthand narrative, paired with audience response, not only describes, but also enacts the symbolic negotiation of the social contract: It is at once a war narrative and a communal ritual about war experience. It forges social cohesion by representing and negotiating cultural knowledge and values.

The focus on ritual and narrative in negotiations of war experience and citizenship transmits both epistemological aspects central for my reading of these practices' cultural work. Through this lens, their discursive contexts and traditions become apparent. It exposes their symbolism, their production and dissemination of knowledge, their construction of meaning, and their constitution of group identity. Yet, by contextualizing milblogs and homecoming scenarios with activist discourse on psychological injury and mental health care,

42 Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 2.

43 Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals: Interfaces between Narratives and Rituals and their Potential for Ritual Studies," 54–58.

44 Herman, David, "Toward," 222.

45 Cf. Ryan, "Will New Media"; Booth, *Digital Fandom*.

this approach also acknowledges the dominant role of individual suffering and of the social-therapeutic thrust in the discourse's cultural work.

This lens on ritual and narrative also avoids pitfalls inherent in strictly disciplinary approaches. On the one hand, it moves the study beyond the dominant focus within cultural studies on the politics and power relations behind warfare. By 'zooming in,' it takes note of the suffering and social struggles of concrete, individual people and observes how activists propose that US society should acknowledge and remedy these struggles. On the other hand, the study's interest in the practices' cultural work and in their discursive traditions avoids a depoliticized perspective on war experience. Some activist psychological approaches portray the protagonists of ceremonial storytelling practices merely as victims of a psychological condition, rendering their experience devoid of any social, political, and cultural contexts and interrelations.⁴⁶ A narrow psychological perspective would also face the conundrum inherent in activist discourse on war experience: In postulating a social crisis in veterans' affairs, highlighting the psychological aspects of war experience, the suffering of individual veterans, and civil society's responsibility for veterans according to the social contract, activists run the risk of overgeneralizing, of associating all war experience with psychological injury and trauma and, thus, of pathologizing and victimizing all veterans.⁴⁷

In taking up the epistemological impulse from activist transcultural comparison in war-related discourse, this book chisels out functional equivalencies between Indigenous ceremonies, non-Native milblogs, and homecoming scenarios. It highlights two major themes within the discourse: a) the cognitive and social psychology of war and b) the discursive context, that is, the practices' self-conscious and self-reflective representation of discourse on war experience as a vehicle to construct group belonging and to negotiate citizenship. First, both Indigenous and non-Native practices address how war experience affects personality and social relationships. Ceremonial storytelling in both cultural contexts represents a group effort to help soldiers and veterans come to terms with their individual war experiences and to relate them to both individual and group identity. Hence, the collective search for meaning helps an individual make sense

46 See the subsection on civil religion and sacrifice in Chapter Three, particularly its discussion on the ambiguity of notions of 'healing' in war-related memorial culture.

47 Cf. Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 10–16. The following chapter, as well as Chapter Four, discuss the fallacy of pathologizing war experience in public discourse in more detail.

of his or her own experiences and put them into perspective. Even when it is not conducted in an explicitly therapeutic setting, such as a soldier's blog entry about a mission to deliver humanitarian aid to an Afghan village, the group (i.e., the audience) responds by acknowledging the experience thus shared and by expressing their support. In the same way, a Native American veteran dancer would perform his or her experience during a ceremony and receive symbolic support and appreciation in the form of corresponding dance steps and applause. Basically, the sequence of narrating experience and group response in these distinct cultural contexts serves to (re)affirm the narrator's relationship with the group. Activist perspectives in psychology, as the following chapter explores in detail, believe that this equivalence carries inherent social-therapeutic potential, which explains their focus on Indigenous role models.

Second, the discursive context marks another functional equivalence between these practices on a more abstract level. If the ceremonial, public exchange of individual narration and affirmative responses serves to constitute meaning and to renew the relationship between Indigenous warriors and their community, then the entire ceremonial setting will also constitute a symbolic negotiation of the group's sense of community and the relationships among its members in general. That is, the audience acknowledges the warrior's soldierly commitment to the group, but also their own responsibility for the warrior's well-being, working toward restoring social and spiritual equilibrium. Tribal cosmology becomes critical in this context. Warriors' actions in war are interpreted by their communities in relation to tribal creation stories, tangible and intangible powers, the interrelations between human beings and the supernatural and the metaphysical, worldviews, and social structures. The discourse on the warriors' participation in battle serves to negotiate and disseminate cultural norms, values, and knowledges.⁴⁸ The corresponding ceremonies, thus, symbolize and reconstitute the tribes' social contract and define parameters of group belonging. This has been relevant for both the era of intertribal and frontier warfare as well as for contemporary Indigenous veteran traditions that were revived and adapted after World War II.

Apart from their interest in specific aspects of trauma therapy regarding Native American war-related rituals, activist proponents of transcultural comparison are primarily fascinated by exactly these Indigenous traditions of achieving social equilibrium through ceremonial negotiations of war experience. Some advertise such ritualized reciprocal pledges to support among

48 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 39, 85–93; Clevenger, *America's First Warriors*, 70–90.

civilians and veterans in homecoming scenarios. The therapeutic motif within US war narratives' cultural work, then, also manifests itself in how the discourse about war experience seeks to restore relationships and to achieve social equilibrium. In adopting this philosophical perspective from Indigenous traditions, social activist discourse works to contain the risk of generally pathologizing war experience; it primarily acknowledges the fact that war disrupts social structures and relationships—with potentially dangerous psychological consequences for individuals. Activists, thus, hold communities (and US civil society in general) accountable to help veterans mend and reforge these structures and relationships upon their return.

I argue that the notion of social equilibrium also serves to explain the cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios. It makes apparent the ceremonial properties and the symbolic negotiation of US citizenship and national identity where the communication among soldiers, veterans, and civilian audiences expresses gratitude and support. I adopt the term “cosmology”⁴⁹ from cultural anthropology in this regard because, once more, the way Indigenous communities interpret war experience in the context of tribal creation stories and world views opens up comparative avenues, pointing to metaphysical aspects in non-Native discourse on war: Protagonists utilize the social-contract motif and the paradigm of civil religion as vehicles to negotiate and correlate war, social cohesion, national identity, and citizenship. The individual's role in civics is, thus, shrouded in the metaphysical. Attributes of US citizenship (e.g., military service and the franchise) are assigned quasi-religious qualities. I posit that non-Native discourse on war experience and identity constructions is as much embedded in its respective, culturally determined cosmology as Indigenous traditions are tied to tribal creation stories and religions. In the non-Native case, the nation and US civil society represent the primary community. Society's relationship to its soldiers is determined by a metaphysically charged set of mutual obligations and pledges to support, notions of sacrifice for the group, a sense belonging and citizenship and the underlying rights and responsibilities.⁵⁰ As much as tribal practices integrate creation stories in their forms of war-related ceremonial storytelling, non-Native practices are imbued with myths and constructions of national and cultural identity. Indigenous war-related traditions, thus, help us perceive the non-Native discourse on war as ceremonial storytelling practices to assert and renew civil-military relationships through collective identity constructions. From this point

49 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 37–45.

50 Cf. Brænder, *Justifying*, 21–43.

of view, Sebastian Junger's proposal that US society should turn toward "tribal ways" is mistakenly perceived as an embrace of "primitivism." Rather, it can be interpreted as a patriotic call to civic responsibility.

However, observations on the functional equivalences between Indigenous and non-Native practices should beware of overlooking critical distinctions between them. Obviously, the different cultural contexts play a major role. Compared to 'Western' mainstream societies, Native American cultures tend to be based on much tighter and more elaborate kinship systems, resulting in complex social relationships.⁵¹ Because US mass society is marked by relatively loose kinship relations beyond the immediate core family, this study is careful not to claim generalizing equivalences between Indigenous and non-Native practices, and it takes note of how activist discourse approaches its cultural comparison in this regard. Likewise, I also consider social and regional differences within segments of US society.⁵² To avoid generalizations toward ahistorical timelessness, this study addresses historical changes in its depiction of Indigenous traditions. It refers to particular tribal customs and practices whenever possible and, if necessary, points out their historical adaptations over time (e.g., the development of military and veterans' societies, and the gradual secularization of particular customs).⁵³

-
- 51 Extended kinship relations in Indigenous societies entail far-reaching social responsibilities, but also guarantees of protection and mutual aid, determining the interactions among community members.
- 52 This concerns social segregation in US society, as military personnel increasingly originates from rural communities in the South and the West. Thompson, "The Other 1 %," 36. Some scholars suggest that rural non-Native communities have social ties close enough to resemble Indigenous kinship and support structures. Egendorf, *Legacies of Vietnam*, 278–79; Holm, "Culture," 148. When necessary, I will address how milblog discourse sometimes idealizes these areas as representing the 'real' America, in contrast to the presumably liberal, urban coastal regions.
- 53 Cross-cultural distinctions also entail a critical perspective on terminology: I will be talking about 'warriors' in the present tense to denote present-day Native American soldiers and veterans engaging in cultural practices relevant to their current relationships with tribal communities, embedded in their respective cultural traditions and customs. The following chapter problematizes the widespread designation of the term 'warrior' for non-Native soldiers and veterans. When discussing non-Native practices, I will use 'soldier' and 'veteran.' The former denotes any enrolled member of the US military, with distinctions by branch of the military, such as 'Marine' or 'Sailor,' if necessary. Cf. Leikauf, "Welcome," 20. The term 'veteran' involves subtleties and technicalities, which becomes significant where legal claims to benefits are at stake. Generally, 'veteran' denotes "Any person who served for *Any* length of time in

The context of cultural comparison and transfer also necessitates a few thoughts on cultural appropriation. My analytic lens on milblogs and homecoming scenarios draws its epistemological impetus from both Native and non-Native activist propositions for such comparative perspectives in the discourse on war experience. My readings take note of how social activists and scholars engage in cultural comparison, how they reflect on their approaches to Indigenous knowledge and artifacts (e.g., obtaining permissions, respecting taboos) and how they seek to break up colonial hierarchies and subject perspectives.⁵⁴ They critically detail how activist texts in psychology and veterans' affairs explore war experience and therapy in cross-cultural contexts. My approach takes up the comparative impulse without proposing transfer myself: This book does not aim to 'indigenize' US veteran reintegration and traumatology (for which I would be neither authorized nor qualified). Rather, I apply academic sources on Indigenous epistemology and traditions to the readings of the discourse on war experience in order to grasp the function of non-Native war-related cultural practices. In this context, I discuss cultural comparison on abstract levels, such as the above observations on cosmology, to avoid generalizations or faulty cross-cultural contextualization, and I evaluate functional equivalences and their cultural restrictions within the primary sources' particular discursive practices.

Finally, Native American war-related ceremonies, non-Native milblogs, and homecoming scenarios are practiced not only in different cultural contexts, but also in vastly different formats, genres and media. This study therefore places emphasis on aspects such as space, embodiment, absence, and presence to scrutinize how these practices facilitate a particular textuality that engenders these functional equivalences. Acknowledging the practices' multimodality also entails observations on the generic traditions in which they are embedded. The following sections, therefore, contextualize milblogs and homecoming scenarios with their genre traditions and with (new) media approaches to motivate them

Any military service branch" and who was honorably discharged. Coleman, "What Is a Veteran?"; Sherrard, "Veterans Day- Who Is a Veteran?" Within this general concept, there sometimes are specific distinctions such as 'war veteran' to denote persons who have been deployed to a war zone, regardless if they have seen combat. As this study is concerned with experience gained in a war zone, and not so much with enrollment status, usage of 'veteran' will be tied to experience and simply denote a person who has returned from deployment. If necessary, I will specify whether this person is still enlisted or has returned to civilian status.

54 In the final chapter, I discuss a conflict between Indigenous veterans and a non-Native healer in more detail to explicate the dangers of unqualified cultural transfer.

as productive primary sources for a historical, cultural-comparative perspective on firsthand representations of war experience in the US.

New Media, Community, and the Traditions of Firsthand US War Narratives

Soldiers and veterans of the post-9/11 wars eagerly embraced the technological opportunities of Web 2.0 to maintain contact with their social environments during deployment and to document and reflect on their experiences. Their activities continue a long tradition of war narratives. They simply harnessed new technologies to boost the velocity, reach, and interactivity of time-honored practices. I perceive these traditional practices in new media as forms of ceremonial storytelling, and their media platforms as convergence sites, that is, as substitutes for a concrete ritual space, because of the greatly improved spectrum of how fast and far soldiers and their audiences interact and jointly interpret the soldiers' and veterans' war experience. This section briefly discusses the emergence of (mil)blogs as elements of the new-and-social-media phenomenon of the 2000s, as well as their specific textuality, to contextualize them with traditional US war narratives, to elucidate how technological specifics help interpret them as civic rituals, and to motivate the selection of milblogs as primary sources for this study. This discussion correlates with a brief introduction to homecoming scenarios: first, to point out that milblogs usually end with the soldiers' return and do not cover readjustment and corresponding social and psychological problems as a critical part of war experience, and, second, because these civic projects illustrate the performativity of ritualized interaction between veterans and civilians.

The emergence of 'Web 2.0' during the 2000s led to new text types and cultural practices. This study's observations on milblogs focus on this transitioning phase since deployed soldiers participated in the development of these practices and actively utilized new technological and textual attributes for their specific purposes. Web 2.0 revolutionized content production, editing, and interaction online,⁵⁵ rendering new-media activities such as blogging as a "cumulative process."⁵⁶ This development transformed traditional notions of authorship; the cycle of posting and commenting, e.g., in blogs, leads scholars to consider

55 Kaplan and Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media," 61.

56 Rettberg, *Blogging*, 4.

bloggers and commenters as the coauthors of a joint narrative.⁵⁷ Early sociological media studies investigated how these technological attributes affect communication. They were specifically interested in how far the enhanced interactivity and collaborative authorship of blogs and social media services allowed their users to form (virtual) communities, what cultural practices such communities engaged in and what social uses they might entail.⁵⁸

I draw on some of these media-studies perspectives here because their interpretations pose typical questions relevant to American cultural studies, exploring the cultural work of online practices. Graham Lampa integrates Benedict Anderson's cultural-history concept of "imagined communities," particularly his observations on the ritualized construction of national identity. He posits that the sense of community within the blogosphere (i.e., a community of bloggers) "is coaxed into existence within the minds of its members in a style that stems from the instant publishing medium itself to create a discursive, transnational, online imagined community."⁵⁹ Arguing with Anderson, Lampa further states that, although bloggers and their audience rarely meet in person, they use their medium to express and interpret shared identity, cultural consciousness (knowledge and values), worldviews, and experience. With these recurrent and mutual expressions of like-mindedness and identity, they perform community-constituting rituals. In short, bloggers construct their communities through the communal and ritualized activities associated with blogging.

My project's cultural-studies framework adds to this perspective, primarily in conjunction with popular-culture scholarship on fan communities: Even before the emergence of collaborative content production in Web 2.0, Henry Jenkins introduced the notion of fans as "textual poachers" who make sense of a television series by debating its meaning. Their activities "bring more and more of the series narrative under their control,"⁶⁰ which strengthens their sense of shared identity and knowledge. Nancy Baym adds an ethnographic perspective

57 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 44.

58 Gurak et al., *Into the Blogosphere*; Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere"; Keren, *Blogosphere*; Rosenberg, *Say Everything*; Rettberg, *Bloggling*. See Kaye, "It's a Blog, Blog, Blog World"; Tremayne, *Bloggling, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*; Johnson and Kaye, "Wag the Blog" for early analyses of the social motivation and affects of blogging in media studies. See Usbeck, "My Blog"; Usbeck, "Don't Forget"; Usbeck, "Keep that Fan Mail Coming" for discussions of media-studies perspectives on the community-building attributes of milblogs.

59 Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere"; cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

60 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 283–84.

in which fans form interpretive “communities of practice,” i.e., they ‘practice’ their community into existence. Their activities illustrate “how the verbal (and, to a lesser extent, the nonverbal) communicative practices [...] can explain ‘the genesis, reproduction, and change of form and meaning of a given social/cultural whole.’”⁶¹ Paul Booth emphasizes how blogs’ textuality boosts interactivity in this context: “[T]o integrate the comments into our notion of the blog is to allow a new reading of ritual communication as it establishes a community.”⁶² He interprets the sequence of blog posts and comments as collaborative, ritualized meaning-making, as collective contributions to the narrative. Hence, Booth introduces the term “narrativity” to describe how fans’ online activities shape the overall narrative of a popular-culture text, such as a television series.⁶³ Similar observations on the communality of social media have been made for other relevant practices, such as the cathartic discourse in cancer blogs,⁶⁴ grief processing in online mourning practices,⁶⁵ or ritual and community-building in online expressions of religiosity and worship.⁶⁶ If we, thus, perceive bloggers and their audience as a community of coauthors engaged in collaborative, communal, and ritualized meaning-making, this study’s interpretation of milblogs as forms of ceremonial storytelling about war experience comes into focus once more.

US military interests have influenced the development of the new media and contributed military and war-related topics to the earliest online discourses, be they strategic deliberations on networks and information warfare,⁶⁷ military veterans’—particularly Vietnam veterans’—activities in chat rooms, webring,

61 Baym, *Tune in, Log On*, 24.

62 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 45.

63 103–26. See Herwig, “Die 140-Zeichen-Frage” for a conceptualization of community construction in social-media platforms such as Twitter.

64 Altena, Notermans, and Widlok, “Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals”; Nagel and Palumbo, “The Role of Blogging in Mental Health.” Cf. “Cancer Blog Directory.” See also the observations on emerging practices in narrative therapy and online technology in mental health care in the following chapter.

65 Gebert, *Carina unvergessen*; Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, “Death on Facebook. Examining the Roles of Social Media Communication for the Bereaved”; Roberts, “The Living and the Dead”; Carlson and Frazer, “‘It’s Like Going to a Cemetery and Lighting a Candle.’ Aboriginal Australians, Sorry Business, and Social Media”; Acton, *Grief in Wartime*.

66 Howard, “Enacting a Virtual ‘Ekklesia’: Online Christian Fundamentalism as Vernacular Religion”; Wagner, *Godwired*; Campbell, *Digital Religion*.

67 Cf. Usbeck, “Power,” 316–18.

and forums since the 1990s,⁶⁸ or self-help mentoring platforms for best practice in leadership among career officers.⁶⁹ According to Johanna Roering, the first war-related blogs emerged during the buildup toward the invasion of Iraq in late 2002. They discussed the political escalation of the conflict, described the troops' preparations and deployment to launch zones, as well as Iraqi life, from various perspectives.⁷⁰

For the purpose of this study, my working concept employs the term 'milblog' to denote soldiers' blogs written from deployment. Previous scholars have developed more ramified terminology to suit disciplinary perspectives. Roering distinguishes war blogs and milblogs, summarizing the former as political news blogs about war, which could be interested authors' second-hand information gleaned from mainstream media, journalists' accounts, or civilians' firsthand reports⁷¹ from the war zone. For the latter, Roering develops a concept based on bloggers' identities and their situatedness regarding war and the military—for her purposes, a milblog might be any blog on military issues, written by an author who associates with the military (e.g., soldiers, veterans, or family members) or they might denote a deployed soldier's blog, featuring attributes of both news blog and diary-type blogging.⁷² In addition to my own understanding of 'milblogs,' focusing on the negotiation of firsthand war experience, I denote other forms of military-associated blogging by their specific context, such as 'spouse blogs,' to distinguish them from soldiers' perspectives of the war zone.⁷³

To fully grasp milblogs as a unique and productive source that fueled the discourse on post-9/11 war experience, it is necessary to discuss their role as transitional media between traditional war narratives and social media platforms, particularly their early phase. These early days were marked by the novelty of

68 Cf. Shay, *Odysseus*, 180–201; Dare, “The Internet as Healer”; Leikauf, “Welcome.”

69 Cf. Rid, “War 2.0.”

70 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 80–84.

71 One such blog was *Where is Raed?*, written under the pseudonym Salam Pax in 2002–03. It attracted worldwide media attention, informing readers about the Iraqi civilian perspective on the invasion. Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 81; Brænder, *Justifying*, 98.

72 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 15–17.

73 Morten Brænder denotes “milblogs” as any war-related blogs, regardless of the author's background, and “front-line blogs” as blogs written by soldiers during deployment. Brænder, *Justifying*, 97–98. As his work explores bloggers' public justifications for placing their own lives at risk in combat, his distinction and emphasis on the “front-line” perspective discussing the bloggers' own contributions to combat is logical. It would be less significant for my own emphasis on negotiations of war experience, that is, on deployment in general, which does not exclusively concern combat.

the medium, by public excitement about the Iraq War, and by the difficulties accessing firsthand information on the war.⁷⁴ This condition also determined the early relationship between milbloggers and mainstream media: Deployed soldiers had specialist information about the inner workings of the war machine from which news media were often excluded. Their accounts were neither constrained by professional journalistic procedures, nor by editorial or market pressures. Roering emphasizes many bloggers' self-perception and reputation as "warrior citizen journalists" whose work served to complement, contradict, or contextualize professional news media content.⁷⁵ At the same time, news media eagerly gathered and featured bloggers' insider information. The media's attention immensely popularized the new genre and generated feedback loops of mutual influence during the early war years in 2003–07.⁷⁶ This mutual influence also facilitated the remedialization of blogs: Bloggers frequently posted reports and e-mails sent to them by other soldiers; their posts would be republished in print media, were included in print collections, and, in some cases, became the blueprint for feature films.⁷⁷

The rapid popularization of milblogs, however, activated institutional pressures as it raised security concerns among military leaders. Colby Buzzell explains how soldiers took photographs and videos of combat and of military equipment, widely sharing them online. He also describes soldiers strapping digital cameras to their helmets to privately film raids on suspected insurgents in Iraq.⁷⁸ Milblog scholars frequently cite Buzzell's post "Men in Black" in this regard. He details how an insurgents' ambush on his unit in Mosul in August 2004 erupts into a major firefight that kills many insurgents and wounds several US troops. The post becomes particularly sensitive because Buzzell contradicts a CNN report which, from his perspective, had downplayed the significance of the event.⁷⁹

74 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 81–84.

75 Roering, 113–47, 181–218; cf. also Fricke, "Erzählstimmen aus dem Terror. Warblogs Amerikanischer Soldaten," 175–78.

76 Cf. Robbins, "Muddy Boots 10"; Bennett, "5 Riveting Soldier Blogs"; Grossman, "Meet Joe Blog"; Hamilton, "Best of the War Blogs." Colby Buzzell, a frequently quoted milblogger from Iraq, states that he was inspired to write his own blog after reading one of these early print media reports on the new genre. Buzzell, "I'm Soo Fucked"; Grossman, "Meet Joe Blog."

77 Greyhawk, "A Brief History of Milblogs." See Usbeck, "Don't Forget" for a detailed analysis of a remedialized blog post. Cf. Burden, *The Blog of War*; Burden, "Taking Chance Home"; *Taking Chance*; Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*.

78 Buzzell, *My War*, 159, 164, 402–03.

79 Buzzell, "Men In Black"; Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 90; Brænder, *Justifying*, 117.

Blog readers then learn about the post's consequences as Buzzell documents the unfolding escalation during the following weeks. Because the post goes viral and is republished and referenced by news media, the military is forced to respond. Its detailed depiction of the event reveals enough insider knowledge to compromise Buzzell's cover of anonymity. Buzzell relates his superiors' frantic attempts to gain control, such as forcing bloggers to submit texts to their superiors for approval before posting, or threatening to exclude him from further missions beyond the camp perimeter. These measures eventually lead him to terminate the blog, but censorship efforts generally also fuel a public debate about soldiers' private use of social media during deployment.⁸⁰

As Roering emphasizes, military leaders' initial response to milblogs illustrates their anxiety about losing control. Information control had been a primary military paradigm for decades, both regarding information the military was ready to share with the media and information soldiers disseminated in their private communication. The emergence of Web 2.0 and social media, especially the popularization of milblogs amid a controversial war, had swiftly rendered the military incapable of retaining total control over either aspect through censorship.⁸¹ Thus, a phase of uncoordinated measures on various levels of the command structure ensued. It interrelated with public debates and lasted until approximately 2010. The military maintained that private Internet use such as milblogs might, unwittingly, compromise operational security (OPSEC) by providing critical information to the enemy, that is, information about US military "activities, intentions, capabilities, or limitations that an adversary seeks in order to gain a military, political, diplomatic, economic, or technical advantage."⁸²

Milbloggers had mixed responses to the leadership's efforts to control, censor, or even outright ban the private use of social media by deployed soldiers. Colby Buzzell defiantly posted the text of the First Amendment when pressure bore down on him. He initially believed the military should not interfere with his

80 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 90; cf. Buzzell, "I'm Soo Fucked"; Buzzell, "Sniper Fire."

81 Collings and Rohozinski, "Bullets and Blogs. New Media and the Warfighter," 2; Usbeck, "Power," 323–24.

82 Camoroda, "Social Media – DoD's Greatest Information Sharing Tool or Weakest Security Link?," 19, 1–2; Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 91–95. Such security concerns also signify interrelated risks to private data security and enemy incursion, e.g., when the military asked Facebook to take down two Navy men's accounts who were believed to have been captured by the Taliban in 2010 and whose Facebook profiles might, thus, have been tampered with by their captors. Moe, "Social Media and the U.S. Army: Maintaining a Balance," 1.

right to free speech. Media reporting on his case argued that censorship was motivated more by military concerns over public relations at a time of increasing civilian reservations about the war, rather than operational security.⁸³

While a few bloggers invoked free speech, others adamantly proclaimed their common interests with the military. The emergence of Internet communication and networks had resulted in new military paradigms such as Information Operations and Strategic Communication since the 1990s. They not only entailed new strategic concepts such as cyber war, but also adapted military public affairs and communication strategies to the opportunities and risks of Web 2.0. Many bloggers now argued that milblogs were not a threat but a public-relations opportunity. After a new regulation sought to prohibit any use of social media sites on government-run computers in the war zone in 2007, bloggers insisted that their work “ha[d] significant benefit in helping to tell the military story [...] By restricting access to YouTube and MySpace, the military is also restricting the ability of any service member to help engage in the ‘hearts and minds’ war.”⁸⁴ These arguments went hand in glove with early strategic notions of “netwars,” arguing that future wars would be dominated by how adversaries employed online media to sway global public opinion. If “[i]n the Information Age, success is not merely the result of whose Army wins, but also whose story wins,”⁸⁵ then military public relations and a clear and convincing representation of one’s identity and goals vis-à-vis an adversary’s become major attributes of winning “the battle of perception.”⁸⁶

Many milbloggers thus posited that their representations of military life, their popularity and resulting reach, and their interaction with civilian audiences contributed to this “battle of perception.” Military strategists, publishing a series of reports on social media use at the time, agreed and urged the leadership to regard bloggers as particular assets because they were not only expert insiders, but their private conversation would not be perceived by the (potentially skeptical) public

83 Buzzell, “Stay Tuned”; Buzzell, *My War*, 336.

84 Qtd. in Lawson, “Loosing The Blogs Of War,” 14. See Usbeck, “Power,” for a detailed analysis of the US military’s efforts to embrace social media for public relations, and the role of “popular narratology” in developing new self-representations regarding social media.

85 Eder, *Leading the Narrative. The Case for Strategic Communication*, 11; cf. Lawson, “Loosing The Blogs Of War,” 20; Ronfeldt and Arquilla, “What Next for Networks and Netwars?,” 328.

86 Wille, “Every Soldier a Messenger: Using Social Media in the Contemporary Operating Environment,” 1.

as official military statements: Seemingly acting as private citizens who wrote about the intricacies of their specialist job, milbloggers would operate as “third-party validators” and “force multipliers” that enhance the stickiness of U.S. strategic communication and propaganda-countering efforts.⁸⁷

In addition, the debate over milblogs and censorship also touched upon the issue of troop morale. Some of the strategic reports pointed out that the generation of young soldiers had grown up with various digital communication and networking platforms; they were “digital natives”⁸⁸ whose social environment was anchored in the practices and gadgets of the Internet age. Their connection to families and friends depended on access to Web 2.0 in the war zone as much as back home.⁸⁹ As leaders became aware that the military’s rank and file were so imbued in the new cultural practices, they realized that strict suppression of social media use would cut deployed soldiers off from their social relations and drastically deteriorate morale.

These interrelated considerations influenced the military’s outlook on social media and eventually determined decisions toward a more permissive approach emphasizing intensive OPSEC and data security training in order to instill awareness and self-policing habits among troops who wanted to use social media. Directive 09–026, issued in February 2010, ended the series of contradictory individual regulations for the time being, promoting the “Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-Based Capabilities.”⁹⁰ In the following years, branches of the military issued and frequently updated “Social Media Handbooks” stipulating best practice regarding security regulations toward the desired “responsible use.”⁹¹

With this historical development in mind, it must be noted that only the very early milblogs, such as Colby Buzzell’s, provide an unfiltered glimpse into actual combat experience because (self-)censorship after 2004 restricted the depiction of combat, weapons, and tactics under OPSEC regulations. It is possible that

87 Collings and Rohozinski, “Bullets and Blogs,” 4; Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 102–04. Cf. also Moe, “Social Media and the U.S. Army”; Smith, “The World Wide Web of War”; Camoroda, “Social Media.”

88 Moe, “Social Media and the U.S. Army,” 10.

89 Collings and Rohozinski, “Bullets and Blogs,” 5; Moe, “Social Media,” 3.

90 United States. Deputy Secretary of Defense, “Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) 09-026”; Moe, “Social Media,” 1; Camoroda, “Social Media,” 1–2; cf. Shachtman, “Army Squeezes Soldier Blogs, Maybe to Death.”

91 U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Online and Social Media Division, “Army Social Media Handbook.”

this restriction discouraged readership to an extent, for part of the appeal of milblogs is to imagine what war ‘feels’ like, including, for many civilians, the alluring spectacle of violence.⁹² Yet, milblogs still provide enough insider information to satisfy civilians’ curiosity about the living conditions and everyday lives of both soldiers and locals in the war zone. They still facilitate informative platforms to discuss and acknowledge soldiers’ individual war experience, disseminating soldiers’ impressions, memories, and opinions and even relating moments of emotional distress and self-doubts over moral issues. As such, they are extraordinary sources on the negotiation of war experience among soldiers and civilians in post-9/11 wars.

Their role as content sources and platforms for the discourse on war experience ties milblogs to military considerations on public affairs and to traditional firsthand war narratives in US literature. Contemporary soldiers’ and veterans’ accounts continue traditions that reach back to the War of Independence.⁹³ Some print memoirs originated as milblogs, highlighting the interrelations of both text types.⁹⁴ Yet, this study particularly focuses on milblogs, rather than veterans’ memoirs, because they present war experience and the soldiers’ reflections in near real-time, promising immediacy because there is almost no temporal gap between experienced events and their representation, between narrated time and narrating time.⁹⁵ Audiences become involved in online discussions because the blogs’ firsthand witness-protagonist perspectives seem to immerse them, to take them closer to the mystified ‘reality of war’ that nonveterans cannot grasp because of cognitive and emotional gaps between their own and soldiers’ and veterans’ lives. The exchange between authors and audience about recent events also allows for public debate on the war, its goals, conduct, and interpretations of its meaning, and it fosters affect-driven, ritualized expressions of empathy. In this, milblogs continue traditions of public discourse from earlier wars, e.g., when family members and friends circulated soldiers’ letters during the Civil War and, eventually, published them in newspapers.⁹⁶ Milblogs’ innovation is their harnessing of the technological opportunities of the Internet to vastly

92 Hit numbers among the results of a YouTube search for the terms “combat footage” and “Afghanistan” support this assumption.

93 See Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*; Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*; Carroll, *War Letters*.

94 See Buzzell, *My War*; Morris, *The Babylon Blog*; Burden, *The Blog of War*.

95 Brænder, *Justifying*, 99.

96 Shapiro and Humphreys, “Exploring Old and New Media,” 4.

expand the interactivity and velocity (as well as the reach and inclusiveness) of such public exchanges.

Thus, the military leadership's decision to perceive bloggers as both protagonists and validators of the military's 'story' appears as a logical choice. As public discourse keeps reverting to the notion of an experiential divide between civilians and the military in debates over the psychosocial impact of war experience since Vietnam, it is particularly significant to note how many observers of post-9/11 war narratives have argued that public, ceremonial storytelling among soldiers, veterans, and civilians facilitates bridging this divide.⁹⁷ The readings of milblogs in chapters Three and Four illustrate this role of storytelling for civil-military relationships.

However, milblogs do not represent the full story of war experience. They tend to fall short of addressing the civil-military experiential gap when it surfaces most forcefully and causes the most critical emotional impact, i.e., at the moment when soldiers return home from deployment and immerse themselves in the normalcy of a civilian society at peace. Johanna Roering identifies this moment as a "blank space"⁹⁸ in milblogs' discussion of war experience. Most blogs end with the soldiers' return home, others peter out in a few more posts at lengthening intervals. They rarely discuss the process of homecoming, the transition phase and the corresponding mental readjustment returning soldiers have to undergo. Nor can they represent the emotional struggles related to war experience and readjustment because these problems typically surface after return from deployment. Investigating public discourse on war experience in milblogs alone would, thus, not grasp the full complexity of the phenomenon. Particularly because this discourse is so charged with historical references to veterans struggling with readjustment and PTSD since Vietnam, this study extends its source base beyond milblogs in order to fill in this blank space and discuss the discourse on war experience among veterans and civilians back home.

The final chapter, thus, explores civilians' engagement in homecoming and veterans' affairs, scrutinizing moments where the discourse addresses veteran readjustment and psychological injuries. My perspective on these practices once more activates a cultural-studies inflection to interface them with milblogs as it considers the performativity of these narrative rituals about homecoming and contextualizes them with the specific textuality of milblogs. Like milblogs, these

97 Pawlyk, "Seeking Ways to Bridge 'Civilian-Military Gap'"; Mallamo, "Bridging the Civilian-Military Divide With Stories"; cf. Thompson, "The Other 1 %."

98 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 110.

practices nurture active audience responses to veterans' narrations of their experience. They, too, perform scripts of ritualized, symbolic assertions of the social contract, of mutual responsibilities and pledges to mutual aid among veterans and civil society. These events are usually performed, documented, and promoted in diverse, interrelated media. Because of their wide range of activities and expressions, they cannot adequately be grasped with the concept of 'text' alone, even in its broadly framed cultural-studies understanding: Their functionality is determined by the interaction and complementary implementation of diverse practices in a variety of media, it frequently utilizes elements of ritualized performance and often requires physical presence. My approach to these cultural practices, thus, employs Diana Taylor's term "scenario," derived from performance studies to complement text-centered concepts.⁹⁹

I read these activist projects as 'homecoming scenarios,' that is, as a growing corpus of medially and modally heterogeneous scripts of civic homecoming rituals, an agglomerate of diverse cultural practices. A scenario might negotiate homecoming experience in texts such as life writing, documentary films, or websites, but it also often requires embodied acts, such as town hall meetings, group therapy sessions, or visits to schools, which are then frequently debated on, amended, and archived in online texts. The 'homecoming scenario' comprises the sum and the synergistic cultural work of all these elements. It entails the narration of experience, but also the scripts of ritualized performances for the public discourse (i.e., as civilian audiences acknowledge veterans' experience and embrace them in symbolic reconstructions of communal identity), as well as documentation and metanarrative promotion of these practices in multimedial text form.

In this sense, the analytic lens of Indigenous war-related ceremonies once more helps pinpoint the discourse's cultural work. Diana Taylor's concept draws on her observations of epistemology among nonliterate, Indigenous cultures; it helps understand homecoming scenarios as "repertoire," as a performance-based and embodied "system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge"¹⁰⁰ that relies on, but is not restricted to, narrative description. Homecoming scenarios bring together both veterans and civilians for the communal performance of civic rituals that are not simply theatrical events staged for a passive audience but require all participants' active contribution to negotiate the meaning of war and war experience for both veterans and for civil society.

99 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

100 Taylor, 16.

Hence, while most readings in the final chapter refer to texts and discuss how their textuality determines their cultural work, it is critical to keep in mind that my adaptation of Diana Taylor's concept reads scenarios as superordinate, ritualized scripts iterated in embodied performances and accompanied by narrative, textual representations (e.g., websites, online forums, films, oral history collections). To further emphasize how homecoming scenarios fill in the "blank space" and seek to ameliorate the civil-military experiential divide, this final chapter not so much focuses on an analysis of the discourse itself as the discussion of milblogs does in the preceding chapters. Rather, it elucidates how social activists motivate, initiate, and publicize their ritual scripts in these various formats in order to negotiate meaning, disseminate knowledge, and propagate their perceptions of community (re)building.

Milblogs and New Media as Primary Sources in a Historiographic Context

Having established that milblogs and homecoming scenarios are productive sources to illustrate public discourse on war and war experience in post-9/11 wars, I will now apply a cultural-history perspective to milblogs as source types. This study addresses the historical roots of current war-related discourse, covering representations of war in a variety of media and genres, asking how their specific textuality determines their cultural work. With respect to milblogs, it also explores in how far the sources illuminate a specific historical moment of transition among media and cultural practices around war experience. This section, therefore, evaluates new media (and milblogs in particular) as sources for a historiographic perspective on war-related discourse.¹⁰¹ In this context, it takes a closer look at social conditions determining this discourse in milblogs, not least because the following questions also determine source selection: What are the drivers, motives, and restraints behind a milblog? How do the circumstances of the soldiers' deployment and their technological ability to reach large audiences almost instantly affect a milblog's content? What are the conditions for lively interaction with commenters? How do milblogs and their textual specifics fit into the historical range of firsthand war narrative text types and genres? Finally,

101 Because the homecoming scenarios employ very diverse practices, media, and text types, I discuss their textual and historical-contextual specifics where I introduce individual projects in the final chapter.

this section discusses source selection criteria, introduces the major primary sources, and outlines their significance and the research interest for each chapter.

First and foremost, the content and extent of life writing from the combat zone is determined by the support of soldiers' basic needs. Historical scholarship on US war letters and diaries states that, generally, soldiers were more inclined to write in detail during a particular war once military infrastructure and the combat situation covered these needs, and milblogging seems to follow similar patterns.¹⁰² A potential milblogger must find favorable technological conditions on site. Johanna Roering notes that the US military in Iraq offered infrastructure to make life in the war zone easier.¹⁰³ This includes communication with home. While soldiers up to World War II wrote letters, Vietnam-era soldiers used voice messages and tape recorders.¹⁰⁴ The twenty-first century offered more immediate means. In addition to telephones and video phone capabilities at camp stores (Post Exchange, or PX), military bases in Iraq provided Internet access and continually sought to improve connectivity. Civilian contractors introduced satellite broadband, enabling Internet-based phone connections. Some local providers operated Internet cafes at military bases, and several bases even offered soldiers the option to purchase Internet access at their quarters.¹⁰⁵

Milblogger Richard Phillips points out that Internet access was determined by the size of the camp and the ratio of public Internet-capable devices per soldier at a given time.¹⁰⁶ While bigger camps were more likely to provide a large WMR facility (welfare, morale, and recreation) well-equipped with computers, or an Internet cafe operated by a contractor, remote Forward Operating Bases (FOB) and the smaller Command Outposts (COP) might only have communication devices restricted to exclusive military use. In addition, WMR facilities tended to restrict the duration of individual sessions on public computers (e.g., 30 minutes per soldier at one time) to ensure high turnover and better access.¹⁰⁷ Such limits would affect a user's ability to compose longer texts, to answer many

102 Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*, 8–11; Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 15–16.

103 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 86.

104 Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*, 9; Shapiro and Humphreys, "Exploring Old and New Media," 4.

105 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 86.

106 Phillips speaks about his experience in Afghanistan. Regarding access to the Internet and communication, I did not encounter sources indicating major differences between his own experience and the conditions in Iraq.

107 Phillips, "Crazy Mud."

comments, or edit and upload photos if they could not prepare them offline on a private device or even have Internet access in their own quarters.¹⁰⁸ Apart from camp infrastructure, bloggers' social backgrounds determine their writing. The relevant criteria for this study include bloggers' duty stations, their military rank, their education, and age.¹⁰⁹ Duty stations, assignments, and rank determine, e.g., access privileges, privacy, and leisure time. Soldiers assigned to camp duties or as mentors for the Iraqi and Afghan national contingents were likely to have less experience with combat situations beyond camp, but they might have more leisure time and access to computers, and they might develop closer bonds with local interpreters, civilian contractors, and troops at the camps which would be reflected in their writing.¹¹⁰

It also stands to reason that education and age affect motivation and capabilities to blog, as well as one's willingness to express experience and emotions publicly in writing. Most of the sources in the selection are written by well-educated men over forty years of age. It appears that their age and experience as career soldiers enhanced their abilities and willingness to reflect on their deployment in the blogs.¹¹¹ Phillips responds to audience inquiries about deployed soldiers'

108 Phillips, "Bloggers," "Week 12."

109 This list might also open up a transnational comparative perspective and include bloggers from other national contingents. My search for German milblogs from Afghanistan, however, revealed that the *Bundeswehr* has been very restrictive regarding the private use of social media among deployed soldiers until recently so that a transatlantic focus could not be pursued further within the scope of this study. Boris Barschow claims that his *Afghanistan-Blog* was the only exception to the rule, controversially approved by his commanding officer due to Barschow's professional background as a freelance journalist. In the wake of suspending conscription and gradually morphing into an all-volunteer force dependent on recruitment after 2011, the *Bundeswehr* followed the US paradigm of cautious encouragement, security training, control, and appropriation, issuing its own social-media guidelines. Telephone interview with Barschow, 4 March 2011; Barschow, "Bundeswehr und Social Media"; Wiegold, "Wenn möglich auch mit Humor"; Stoltenow and Wiegold, "Die Digital Natives ziehen in den Krieg"; Steffen, "Internet und Krieg." A future focus on Afghanistan and ISAF might also open up a comparative approach including further national contingents, such as Sweden's. See Hellman, "Milblogs and Soldier Representations of the Afghanistan War."

110 The readings in chapters Three and Four illustrate that the bloggers frequently reflected on security concerns, e.g., when discussing casualties or injuries at their camp, even if they were not personally involved in combat, and they will discuss bloggers' transcultural perspectives in their interaction with locals.

111 My thanks to Brian Schneider for bringing these social considerations to my attention.

communication habits, suggesting that a soldier's personality will affect his or her writing, as well. Extroverted personalities would likely also engage in more elaborate communication with home during deployment. However, as Phillips cautions, the course of deployment might affect their inclination to share experience and memories with their social environment: some events might be too emotionally distressing for soldiers to put into words, and they might want to protect relatives from the emotional stress and concern for the soldiers' well-being related to these memories.¹¹² On the other end of the scale, Phillips finds that monotonous everyday routines and boredom, which he calls "groundhog days," might be considered too insignificant or too tiresome to share with the world.¹¹³ In general, traditions of hypermasculine, stoic endurance of war's hardships are only slowly overcome. The military culture of silence is, therefore, a central issue in civic engagement in veterans affairs and social therapy. Activists hope to overcome this silence by promoting reintegration through ceremonial narrative. The chapters below will frequently address these tensions between the urges to bury and to share one's war experiences.

While gender specifics are beyond the scope of this study to address in particular detail, the growing role of women in the military is reflected in war narratives, such as discussions about female soldiers in combat roles and other gender-related topics. Thus, in addition to the selection criteria that resulted in a primarily male corpus of bloggers, I made it a point to integrate voices of female bloggers wherever they are available.¹¹⁴ It might also be worthwhile to contextualize women's milblogs with female veterans' life writing in future works, the latter having been researched and documented more thoroughly to date. My own research of publications emerging from veterans' writing projects and of the homecoming scenarios discussed in the final chapter suggests that gender-specific topics, such as the influence of military service on gender roles in spousal relationships, motherhood, or the physical challenges of military training and deployment for women will be recurring themes in deployed women's blogs.¹¹⁵ The collaborative blog CaptainMolly.com, embedded in the site Military.com,

112 For observations on the "inarticulation of violence" in milblogs in this context, see Brænder, *Justifying*, 15.

113 Phillips, "Bloggers."

114 Cf. the subsection "Ritualized Negotiations of Stress During (and after) Deployment" in Chapter Three, where a female soldier reflects on emotional affects of deployment, e.g., regarding motherhood.

115 See examples of women's writing in Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*; Leche, *Outside the Wire*; Martin et al., *The Journal of Military Experience*.

discusses female identity in the military in general and is not restricted to deployed female troops. It also engages with sensitive issues such as rape and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).¹¹⁶

Milblogs frequently address their authors' motivations to blog, reflecting results of new-media-studies research on general blog use motivations. They include authors' desires to share expert information and opinions, to stay in contact with their social environment, or to release emotional tensions through cathartic writing and discourse.¹¹⁷ The blogs consulted for this study relate to their individual motivations in a number of posts where authors reflect on their state of mind as well as on their relationship with their audience. They address their desire to document life in the war zone (both their own and the locals'), to express insider conclusions about the war's progress, to communicate with friends and family, to flesh out, complement, or contradict news media accounts, or even to educate readers about cultural and social differences between US and Afghan society.¹¹⁸ Given the controversies over security and Strategic Communication among milbloggers and the military leadership in the mid-2000s, it is not surprising that some bloggers also meta-referentially propagate their role as semi-independent "force multipliers"¹¹⁹ for the military's public affairs efforts.¹²⁰

As stated above, milblogs represent a transitional phase in war writing. The post-9/11 wars coincided with rapid developments in communications

116 "About Women in the Military." My thanks to Svetlana Makeyeva for pointing me to this website and for our discussion of female online war writing during the workshop "Storytelling from the Combat Zone—Military Blogs as Contemporary War Narratives" in Dresden, November 2012. Generally, one might speculate that women on active duty (and, thus, also female soldiers during deployment) are probably more hesitant to discuss sexism and sexual abuse openly online than discharged female veterans who do not have to face future harassment, repercussions by superiors, and a corresponding institutional culture of silence as much.

117 Kaye and Tremayne, "Blog Use Motivations," 131–41. Cf. Nardi, Schiano, and Gumbrecht, "Blogging as Social Activity, or, Would You Let 900 Million People Read Your Diary?"; Kinniburgh and Denning, *Blogs and Military Information Strategy*, 6–7; Shapiro and Humphreys, "Exploring Old and New Media," 3.

118 Cf. Traversa, "From Cats"; Traversa, "Terrible"; Temple, "The Writer."

119 Collings and Rohozinski, "Bullets and Blogs. New Media and the Warfighter," 4.

120 See Burden, *The Blog of War*, 22. See also the subsection "Winning this War with Education" in Chapter Four for detailed discussions on the ambiguities in notions of independence and private opinionneering in milblogs, particularly in the context of (self-)censorship and military public relations.

technology and with corresponding shifts in cultural practices. The discourse on war experience of the 2000s reflects these shifts in its intermingling and fluctuating use of different media and genres. This study documents these shifts in its source selection and its analysis of specific functions among various media and genres. As Roering observes, while blogs reporting from deployment rapidly became very popular, their number decreased in the late 2000s, as well as the number of news media reports on milblogs. She cites protagonists within the milblogosphere musing that this decline might in part be due to OPSEC restrictions, but it also reflects a more general change in user patterns, as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms enjoyed rapidly increasing clienteles and established dominant market positions since then.¹²¹ The blog host site Milblogging.com, integrated into the semiofficial site Military.com and featuring 3,900 military blogs in some fifty countries with over 23,000 registered members in December 2013, migrated to Facebook shortly thereafter and is no longer available as a stand-alone website.¹²² Many individual blogs also transferred their content to interlinked accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and other services.¹²³ As Roering and others did for the milblog phenomenon, media studies have already begun to pursue these more recent practices of social-media use in the military.¹²⁴ It would be worthwhile expanding their analyses by approaching soldiers' and veterans' use of social media from a cultural-history and cultural-studies perspective, by contextualizing user practices with the tradition of firsthand war narratives and with the negotiation of war experience, of which milblogs had been the latest innovations in the early 2000s. It would be particularly fascinating to apply a perspective of ritualized public discourse on war experience to the analysis of these new social-media practices; they promise to reveal more networked exchange among soldiers and civilian audiences than even milblogs. However, platforms like Twitter and Facebook accentuate the everyday and the mundane, reflected in quick links and text snippets, and they confront participants with much more, and more diverse information by more people than a blog, that is, a user must put considerable effort into selecting bits and pieces relevant to his or her interests from the overall pile.¹²⁵ Blogs, however,

121 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 108–09.

122 Haigh and Pfau, "Examining the Content of Milblogs and Their Influence on Public Support for War," 260–61; Brænder, *Justifying*, 100; "Milblogging.Com."

123 Cf. Leikauf, "Welcome," 395, 397–98.

124 Cf. Silvestri, *Friended at the Front*; Emery, review of *Friended at the Front*.

125 The chapters below will recur to this observation, discussing how some veteran protagonists within the discourse warn that social media's bombardment with

are frequented by readers who are interested in the blogger's choice of topics; their textuality invites thoughtful reflection, giving room for epistolary narration that resembles the traditional text types of war narratives (e.g., diaries, memoirs, letters). Blogs' textuality activates processes of communicative ritualization in ways that social media cannot.

Possibly, then, future scholarship might consider milblogs an intense, albeit brief, phase in the history of firsthand war narratives. Owing to the pioneering and initially chaotic, free-for-all situation of early Web 2.0 use among soldiers in Iraq after 2003, to the resulting attempts by military leaders to restrict, channel, and harness the phenomenon, as much as to the accelerating pace of media hypes and the emergence of new media products such as Facebook, milblogs provide a glimpse into the public negotiation of war experience from Iraq and Afghanistan that is at once very deep and very narrow: They offer seemingly unfiltered access to how soldiers perceive, represent, and contextualize their war experience. The speed and global scale of their communication is unprecedented compared to earlier war narratives. Never before had so many civilians such immediate and relatively unfiltered access to soldiers' private reflections on war. Yet, dynamic institutional conditions, the pace of technological innovation, and corresponding changes in media use influenced the cultural practice of milblogging in a way that future scholars might perceive it as unique to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—(self-)censorship now thoroughly filters the content, and communication has generally migrated to other platforms generating their own, unique, textuality.

Milblogs' function as historical primary sources should, thus, also be considered in this context. Roland Leikauf provides an excellent primer for his own veteran website sources, and most of his observations are relevant for a critical analysis of (mil)blogs, as well. Online content has already begun to challenge historical research methods and will do so much more intensely once online media and cultural practices become regular subjects for research in social, cultural, and media history. This is not least a concern because of the instability of online data: websites and blogs can suddenly be taken offline, providers might cease operations in a highly volatile market, and media hypes cause users to migrate

mundane aspects of everyday civilian life distracts deployed soldiers from mentally immersing themselves in their mission, rather than granting them respite from the stresses of war. Cf. Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 25.

Frank Usbeck - 9783631782941

Downloaded from PubFactory at 03/09/2021 05:02:11AM

via free access

their content between formats, platforms, and providers.¹²⁶ Online content—particularly in Web 2.0—might be continually edited, and supplemented, after the researcher’s last visit and save. The Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine (web.archive.org) helps researchers track down some of these changes; it allows them to locate and save other users’ “momentary captures”¹²⁷ of earlier versions of a website or blog.¹²⁸ Generally, the instability of data forces researchers to archive their work diligently, compartmentalize and document individual research steps, acknowledge the volatility of their sources, and consider the blank spots on the map, i.e., be aware that significant sources might remain beyond their grasp.¹²⁹

Leikauf also addresses issues of authorship that are particularly relevant when we consider blogs, as discussed above, as collaborative and cumulative efforts in the production of a narrative.¹³⁰ As with some of Leikauf’s websites, some early milblogs (e.g., Buzzell’s) were written anonymously, which raises the issue of authenticity in analyzing them as primary sources if the author’s identity remains unknown. Fortunately, all of my major milblog sources clarified authorship; they wrote at a time when military authorities would not have tolerated an anonymous blog from deployment. To pay credit to the collaborative effort of blogging, I treat commenters and cohosts as coauthors. Regarding blog posts as “ultimately authored by both blogger and commenter,”¹³¹ I understand them as ‘parent items’ and will list them in the bibliography under the blogger’s name,

126 Leikauf, “*Welcome*,” 138. Leikauf states that over two hundred websites from his source pool went offline during his research. I faced similar problems with blogs, albeit on a much smaller scale.

127 Leikauf, 138.

128 The Wayback Machine enabled me to work with Buzzell’s and other bloggers’ posts and comments that were taken offline before and during my research. I also used it to document relevant changes in the layout of one of my primary milblogs and to contextualize them with significant events during the soldier’s deployment. However, research using the Wayback Machine is still limited to what other web users saved; it cannot retrieve all deleted content.

129 Research relying on online sources such as websites also has to consider search engine’s algorithms and their influence on result ranking, or on customized results based on the researcher’s previous search patterns and user profile. Cf. Cadwalladr, “Google, Democracy and the Truth about Internet Search.”

130 Leikauf, “*Welcome*,” 139–40. In Leikauf’s particular case, working with a large pool of interrelated websites, the researcher faces challenges in identifying which person contributed which content elements (such as photos, or text segments) to a website, and how to determine, e.g., ownership and copyrights.

131 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 44.

but reference audience comments or text segments written by a cohost in the footnotes as: (Commenter/Cohost Name, in “Post Title”) to disambiguate. In cases where vivid discussions ensued over extended periods, inviting numerous comments by the same person(s), I add the comment’s date and time stamp in the reference.

Considering these technological, institutional, and sociocultural determinants in the use of milblogs, I have devised a set of selection criteria for my primary sources to suit the purpose and analytic interest of this study. Previous scholars were often interested in the technological specifics and specific user practices of milblogging, its embeddedness in generic and medial traditions, its typologies, and its social factors.¹³² My own study understands milblogs as a vehicle to explore the public discourse on war experience and its dominant themes centering on civil-military relations, community, ritual, and emotional stress. Therefore, my selection is more focused on finding detailed manifestations of this discourse and integrating them with my transcultural and historical perspective, rather than analyzing, quantifying, or classifying the diversity and breadth of expressions and authors’ social backgrounds within the medium. Consequently, my focus results in a smaller and more homogeneous sample of blogs from which I derive my readings.

First and foremost, my approach requires a few readings of long-term blogs covering an entire tour of deployment and providing a steady sequence of relatively detailed entries in short intervals. It is important to anchor them in the tradition of epistolary firsthand war narratives, such as letters, diaries, or memoirs, for better comparability of “dense” material.¹³³ Due to my chief interest in civil-military discourse, my sources naturally need a large readership, as well as many comments in order to depict vivid interaction. For that reason, I searched

132 Cf., e.g., Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*; Brænder, *Justifying*; Shapiro and Humphreys, “Exploring Old and New Media”; Chouliaraki, “From War Memoirs to Milblogs”; Estes, “Writing the War”; Mark et al., “Blogs as a Collective War Diary.”

133 Brænder, *Justifying*, 100. Future analyses of war experience on social networking sites can draw on early social-media-studies concepts to adapt their methodologies to the brevity of content prevalent in microblogging formats such as Twitter, or integrate visual-studies methodologies for image-centered formats such as Instagram and YouTube. However, the discourse among authors and audience in YouTube comments or Facebook discussion threads would follow similar criteria and could be analyzed in similar fashion as the one in milblogs. Cf. Herwig, “Die 140-Zeichen-Frage: Microblogging, Twitter und die liminoide Verhandlung des Sozialen im Web 2.0.”

Milblogging.com's "Top 100" blog list section to reflect popularity and then spot-searched featured blogs, such as winners of the blogging community's annual "Milbloggie" Award. Within this selection, I searched for blogs with frequent comments, which led to critical reflection on comment policies and practices. A blog host site such as Wordpress.com enables its users to determine rules for commenting, e.g., to automatically publish incoming readers' comments, to approve comments manually, to force commenters to identify themselves, to close comments after a specific period, or to disable comments in general. These measures control spam, serve to police inappropriate behavior, or to shield the blogger from any public response if so desired. Hence, my selection relies on blogs that exercise the highest-possible openness toward incoming comments and generate a platform for public discourse and collaborative storytelling and meaning-making.¹³⁴ In addition, my analysis takes into account that, unless a blogger explicitly outlines procedures, it remains unclear whether and why particular comments (e.g., criticism of the bloggers' thoughts and opinions) might have been disapproved or edited out.¹³⁵ Although not as encompassing as the veterans' website authors discussed in Leikauf's work,¹³⁶ bloggers thus retain a degree of control over the discourse and its ritualized proceedings in their editorial roles as blog hosts.

My selection also entails a spatial criterion. With respect to deployment blogs, this study focuses primarily on blogs from Afghanistan (apart from historical contextualization and select examples for particular problems, as with Buzzell's blog). Troop withdrawal from Iraq was already being discussed and the end of US military engagement seemed in sight when I began to work on this project; Afghanistan thus 'promised' a continual replenishment of sources and opportunities for related projects while my research progressed. In addition, much of the early scholarship and media attention to milblogs was centered on Iraq so that my focus on Afghanistan extends the source base in the field. As the readings reveal, this also allows me to scrutinize notions of Afghanistan as the 'forgotten war' in the discourse among bloggers' and commenters.

With these underlying conditions determining my source sample, the readings in chapters Three and Four are based on the complete study of three

134 I, thus, disregarded several blogs with huge audiences that were also frequently cross-referenced in news media, but featured no publicly accessible comment section.

135 I have briefly discussed bloggers' public reflections on dissenting comments before, and include explanations throughout this study when necessary. Usbeck, "Don't Forget," 103.

136 See Leikauf, "Welcome," 338–39.

blogs by middle-aged, white, male career soldiers whose (primarily) noncombat positions provided the time and the means to post detailed entries covering their entire deployment regularly, sometimes also their training and homecoming. They are complemented by individual posts from other blogs to illuminate specific aspects of war experience which do not need to consider the full term of these bloggers' deployment. The readings are organized by topic, rather than by sources, and discuss entries from all blogs where they pertain to the question at hand. The first major blog, *Afghanistan Without a Clue*, is authored by Captain Douglas Traversa, an Air Force career officer who spent one year as an embedded trainer (ETT) for the Afghan National Army's logistics department in 2006–07. Traversa is in his mid-forties at the time of writing, and was selected for the post under complicated and unforeseen circumstances. He did not expect to deploy and felt ill-prepared for the assignment—hence the blog's title. Consequently, he directs much of his writing to discussing aspects of training, the challenges of deployment, and collaboration with the Afghan contingent to help future replacements prepare for their tasks.¹³⁷ The blog illustrates transcultural communication in intense, detailed debates between Traversa and his Afghan interpreters. It also reflects how US soldiers seek to retain a sense of civilian normalcy during deployment, frequently engaging US popular culture (e.g., films, sports, computer games, television shows, and history).

The second blog, *Afghanistan: My Last Tour*, is authored by Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Rex Temple during his deployment in 2009–10. Temple is also over forty years of age, and his deployment to the Middle East is his fourth and last major assignment before retirement. Temple also serves as an embedded trainer with the Afghan National Army.¹³⁸ His blog contributes a significant aspect to this study because, during his deployment, Temple launches an expansive donation drive for school supplies among his readers, distributing items among children during humanitarian missions.¹³⁹ The blog vividly reflects the discourse between soldiers and US civilians over the conduct and meaning of the Afghanistan War, using Temple's civic engagement as examples in nation-building. It also illuminates the ambiguities of milblogging as Temple's private engagement increasingly blends in with his military tasks, such as serving as his unit's public affairs official, which is echoed in his writing.

137 Traversa, "Introduction"; E-mail message to author, 23 October 2012.

138 Temple, "The Writer."

139 See the subsection "Winning this War with Education" in Chapter Three for a close reading of how this drive is represented in the blog.

The third blog, *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan*, is written by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Phillips between 2007 and 2010. At a similar age as the previous bloggers, Phillips serves a fifteen-month deployment in 2007–08 and redeploys to Afghanistan in early 2010. He is a surgeon in charge of a field hospital, but also serves as a US liaison officer to other national ISAF contingents. His blog frequently discusses the challenges of nation-building as he describes the lives of Afghan civilians treated in his hospital, as well as the construction of a new hospital building. Yet, his writing is also significant because it addresses emotional struggles during deployment and reintegration, explicating the author's depression and search for a sense of purpose back home which, eventually, leads him to redeploy.¹⁴⁰

This core source sample necessarily results from my interest in blogs with a large and active audience whose authors are in positions not only to gain war experience, but also to share this experience online regularly, and it is contrasted by more heterogeneous sources regarding gender and ethnicity in the final chapter on homecoming scenarios. None of these bloggers were assigned to primary combat roles, and their tasks required heightened transcultural sensitivity which is reflected in the choice of topics and the authors' perspectives on Afghan culture. It is possible that these perspectives would appear bleaker and darker had they been assigned to combat infantry tasks, resulting in frequent ambushes and repeatedly challenging them to distinguish insurgents from civilian bystanders. However, such tasks would, in turn, probably have inhibited their ability to write. The resulting material also reflects erstwhile gender roles in a war context, that is, apart from some of the complementary individual posts, women appear in nurturing roles as spouses, relatives, civic activists, and interested readers in the comments section. Similarly, the racial composition of the source pool and the final selection stand out, as the selection criteria produced a homogeneously white sample. The racial background of current US firsthand war narratives would likely offer a fascinating research perspective, but it would be beyond the scope of this study to systematically explore or even speculate about plausible interpretations in how far, and why, the ethnic and racial composition of the US armed forces would diverge from that of deployed or veteran writers.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, the milblog readings address ethnicity in the white

140 Phillips, "Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan."

141 A 2014 collection on the benefits and challenges of writing instruction for student veterans bemoans the lack of current research about ethnic and racial affiliations in the military regarding "literacy practices, degree attainment, and employment opportunities." Doe and Langstraat, introduction to *Generation Vet: Composition*,

Frank Usbeck - 9783631782941

bloggers' perspectives on the Afghan locals with whom they interact, and they reveal the bloggers' reflections on ethnic and ethnocentric subjectivity regarding the war in US public opinion. In this sense, the blogs not only represent public discourse on war experience, but also on race relations and ethnicity.

This study is organized in four major content chapters to investigate the discursive phenomenon around war experience. While it conducts readings of three diverse primary source types and media—activist scholarship and non-fiction in Chapter Two, milblogs in chapters Three and Four, and homecoming scenarios (represented in essay collections, documentary films, and websites) in Chapter Five—they all contribute to the discourse through self-reflective, ritualized narrations of war experience, as well as interactive communication among soldiers, veterans, and civilians about these narratives.

Chapter Two is the stepping stone to understand milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of ceremonial storytelling, of negotiating war experience in a ritualized, narrative setting. It combines a descriptive, cultural-anthropological introduction of Indigenous war-related traditions with close readings of activist texts in (military) psychology, nonfiction, news media, and social work, to carve out the functional equivalencies between Indigenous and non-Native traditions of narrating war and, thus, to explain the appeal Indigenous traditions have for non-Native activist discourse on war experience. Ultimately, I argue that the complex cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios only becomes apparent when they are understood from the perspective of these Native war-related traditions, and integrated with observations on activists' transcultural role modeling. The chapter discusses how the focus on war experience and psychological war injury serves to postulate a social crisis in civil-military relations and it explores how academic and social activists operationalize ritual and narrative as major themes in their constructions of communal practices to alleviate this crisis.

Chapter Three investigates ritual as a vehicle to negotiate social cohesion and to promote individual and social therapy regarding war experience. It applies the concept to a first reading of milblogs, having theorized ritual further in the context of anthropology, ritual studies, as well as media and cultural studies. Drawing on the cultural-comparative lens of Indigenous ceremonies, it argues

Student Veterans, and the Post-9/11 University, 22. I would add that this research could extend to inquiries into the racial and ethnic composition of academic and community writing courses and groups, as well as online first-person-narrative networks, such as milblogs and social media platforms.

that rituals provide a discursive context to construct and assert collective identity as they enact values, knowledge, and meaning in symbolic communication. Non-Native war-related practices such as milblogs can, thus, be perceived as rituals, rendering milbloggers and civilian commenters as a discourse community engaging in symbolic negotiations of war experience. The cultural significance of Indigenous war-related ceremonies, thus, offers a central methodological instrument for the understanding of milblogs in a similar discursive, albeit different cultural context. The chapter explores this discursive context with reference to US cultural traditions and concepts such as civil religion, particularly to related notions of 'sacrifice' in discourses on war and citizenship. The readings of milblogs in this chapter draw on representations of mourning for war casualties to discuss how symbolic, ceremonial negotiations of death and sacrifice serve to process grief, to construct identity and memory and, explicitly, to maintain civil-military relationships.

Chapter Four asks how the impact of war experience on soldiers' personalities serves to negotiate and reconstruct civil-military relationships. Further delving into readings of milblogs, it outlines the narrative and ritualistic patterns through which bloggers render the process of gaining experience and share their conclusions with their audience, before analyzing the cultural knowledge they create. In addition to reflecting the soldiers' often painful learning process, this analysis of milblog interaction emphasizes the authors' dedication and their audience's encouragement to grasp extreme experiences not only as a burden, but also as an asset worth sharing. Discussions on the meaning of war experience, as the readings illustrate, facilitate building and maintaining relationships within the virtual milblog community and, thus, symbolize the social contract between civilians and the military. In addressing how the blogs reflect their authors' sense of mission beyond their assigned duties, the chapter also foreshadows practices of communal war discourse and reintegration after deployment.

Finally, Chapter Five explores 'homecoming' as a liminal and often protracted process of mental and emotional readjustment. It analyzes the role of narrative and ritual in civic-activist communal practices designed to help veterans reintegrate into civilian life. The chapter takes up the discussion where most milblogs leave a gap. They usually end their narrative with their authors' physical arrival at home, neglecting the veterans' transition process and liminal status. This fifth chapter, therefore, emphasizes the ritualizing role of the returnee's immersion into embodied communal practices. It investigates how social activists raise public awareness and utilize notions of ritual, community, and social therapy to propose reforms in veteran reintegration. The primary sources for this chapter are conceptualized as 'homecoming scenarios,' that is,

as transmedial, heterogeneous, ceremonial scripts about homecoming, designed to foster exchange and to mend relationships among veterans and civilians but also to engage in social-therapeutic practices. The chapter offers close readings of textual representations, such as autobiographical writing, documentary film, and websites, to illustrate how homecoming scenarios interweave diverse media to conduct, document, and promote their civic rituals. Of particular interest is the ritualization of performance practices (e.g., in town hall meetings and theater plays) and the scenarios' explicit cultural reference to performative and ceremonial traditions of negotiating war experience, such as Indigenous rituals or ancient Greek tragedy. Taking their cue from three different primary source types in diverse media formats and genres, the readings in these chapters, thus, elucidate how various forms of ceremonial storytelling embrace narrative and ritual in the discourse on war experience to address the sense of social crisis and to self-consciously propose community-oriented solutions.

