

2. Narrating War: Activist Discourse and Cultural Comparison

Contemporary America is a secular society that obviously can't just borrow from Indian culture to heal its own psychic wounds. But the spirit of community healing and connection that forms the basis of these ceremonies is one that a modern society might draw on.¹

The wars of the twenty-first century have rekindled public discourse on war experience that had been pervaded by notions of social crisis since Vietnam. Because, like Vietnam, the new wars could not be concluded quickly and decisively, they forced the US public to revise relationships between civil society and the military. Initially, the discourse was marked by fervent and well-medialized public support for the troops, regardless of controversies over the political justification of the war in Iraq. As the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan dragged on and casualties mounted, the debate increasingly revolved around concerns about psychological injuries, physical disabilities, veterans' reintegration struggles, and veterans' suicides. Over time, the media's focus shifted and immediate attention to military operations waned, while activist observers decried a social segregation between a small professional force, largely comprised of consecutive generations of military families in mostly rural areas, and civil society. This social gap presumably safely allows US civilians to ignore the wars as not immediately relevant to their own lives which, ostensibly, compounds veterans' problems.² All these various manifestations illustrate how segments of US society reflect on civil-military relationships and call upon civil society to more actively acknowledge the social contract and live up to its responsibilities toward soldiers and veterans. It is this civic-activist environment in which references to Indigenous war-related practices, such as Sebastian Junger's suggestion in the above motto,

1 Junger, *Tribe*, 121.

2 Among others, see Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 4–5, 41–43; Thompson, “The Other 1 %.” The following chapters will recur to this issue and describe how some milbloggers echo the sentiment that civil society does not seem to care about the wars and about the soldiers' experience.

emerged in recent years, with protagonists promoting their agenda in academia, therapeutic practice, among veterans, and the general public.

This chapter, therefore, analyzes how activist discourse on war experience operationalizes cultural comparison with Native American war-related traditions. It explores how recourse to Indigenous community-oriented practices serves to promote the communal within the discourse. This emphasis on communality entails the philosophical notions of the civil-military social contract and the corresponding social responsibilities, and implementations of these responsibilities in activist efforts regarding social therapy and social work. This chapter particularly carves out how activist discourse negotiates these communal responsibilities and relationships through self-conscious invocations of narrative and ritual, i.e., it investigates the role of ceremonial storytelling about war experience within the discourse. In this respect, it discusses how non-Native activist transcultural comparison with Indigenous traditions seeks to create communal rituals of narrating war experience in civil society which often explicitly serve social-therapeutic functions.

My discussion of these practices, ultimately, argues that extending these activists' cultural comparison based on ceremonial storytelling to my analysis of the cultural work of milblogs carves out a new field of intercultural knowledge production. My analysis of the functional equivalencies between Indigenous and non-Native activist war-related practices is key to understanding milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of ceremonial storytelling, of negotiating war experience and the resulting relationship between members of the military and civil society in a public and ritualized setting. I argue that the complex cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios only becomes apparent when they are perceived from the perspective of these Native war-related traditions, when they are contextualized with the activists' emphasis on communality and on the therapeutic in cultural comparison and role-modeling. In their practices, narrative and ritual become transcultural concepts to create knowledge about war experience and to combine notions of communality with therapy in order to construct solutions for the postulated social crisis.

The chief interest in Indigenous practices among activists lies in working towards social equilibrium through ceremonial negotiations of war experience. My reading highlights that the activists' cultural-comparative thrust is motivated by cultural skepticism (and corresponding exoticism), by anxiety about the state of civil-military relationships and about how the social fabric of US society is reflected in its military. The notion of the social contract, expressed through civil religion, serves as a vehicle in non-Native activist discourse to translate Indigenous cosmology into mainstream society perspectives on the interrelation

of war, social cohesion, national identity, and citizenship. Comparing US society with Indigenous traditions, activists emphasize the role of mutual obligations and pledges for support, attributing quasi-religious qualities to citizenship and civil-military relationships. This chapter, thus, explores how ritual and narrative entail notions of social therapy in these transcultural comparisons and, in doing so, it prepares the analysis of ceremonial storytelling in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. Dialoging transcultural comparison in activist discourse with the cultural practices of milblogs and homecoming scenarios discussed in chapters Three and Four reveals that they conduct similar cultural work, serving similar discursive functions and employing similar concepts.

As this study is interested in determining how narrating individual military experience and civilian responses serve a community to symbolically negotiate both the meaning of war for an individual's sense of self and for the group's sense of belonging, it pays particular attention to elements of symbolic communication. The examples below consider tribally specific cultural contexts, but the focus remains on these practices' discursive context—i.e., how narrating war experience conducts cultural work and in how far similar discursive practices might affect similar work in other cultural contexts—which then provides the analytic lens for my discussion of non-Native milblogs and homecoming scenarios. While this approach must necessarily leave some aspects of a deep ethnographic perspective aside, its interest in discursive contexts and cultural work enables cultural comparison and reveals the gist (and the limitations) of non-Native activists' attempts at cultural transfer and their practices of role modeling. The subsections also interface further disciplinary approaches with the cultural-studies thrust of this project. The part on Indigenous traditions draws on texts and concepts in Native American studies (which primarily follow historical, anthropological, and religious-studies approaches). The sections on cultural transfer, non-Native civic activism, and psychology provide an overview of major concepts in veteran studies, in the fields of psychology relevant to military issues, as well as cultural history, narratology, and media studies.

The subsection below applies an anthropological-historical perspective, taking a closer look at Native American military traditions and at scholarship on select tribal and pan-tribal ceremonies. This overview contextualizes non-Native activist discourse on Indigenous traditions and explains how and why civic activism makes notions of narrative and ritual productive for non-Native cultural practice in veterans' affairs. It describes how Indigenous traditions negotiate the effect of war experience on warriors' personalities and how, in turn, communal relationships need to address these changes. The following subsections (as well as Chapter Four) refer to these aspects and discuss how non-Native civil

society addresses war experience, war's impact on soldiers' personality, and civil-military relationships. They investigate how activist discourse seeks to identify transhistorical and transcultural aspects of war experience, postulating universality, especially in conjunction with research on archetypes. This perspective also considers the traditions in which activist discourse is embedded, namely the discussions on national identity and character regarding the American Frontier, modernity, and 'Western' civilization since the late nineteenth century.

The reading sections focus on protagonists in psychology, psychotherapeutic practice, and activism in social therapy and veteran reintegration. They analyze the frequently explicit attempts to reform veteran support and trauma therapy with reference to Indigenous role models. They introduce debates over the depiction of non-Native US soldiers as 'warriors,' and the notion of civil-military relationships as a social contract inherent to group belonging and citizenship. The readings, thus, illuminate the interrelations between public debate and specialist discourse communities, such as psychology and mental health care; I trace these interfaces and address particular elements informing both the specialist and the more general debate, namely the growing role of 'narrative' for specialist and popular notions of healing. These interfaces, once more, highlight the prominence of ceremonial storytelling within the discourse.

Native American Traditions of Warrior Reintegration

We Indians are grateful that the United States became such a militaristic country because it has provided us with an acceptable way to continue our warrior ways.³

In the history of Native American cultures, warfare is a prominent feature. It generated elaborate war-related cultural practices and produced innumerable famous warriors and war leaders. The history and historiography of Native American warfare, however, are determined by their colonial context: Popular culture, especially the romanticizing genre of the Western, emphasized war and warriorhood in Euro-American interpretations of Indigenous cultures and shaped national-historical self-perceptions in the United States. The image of the fierce Native American warrior helped both justify and glorify the colonization of the continent. As Cherokee-Creek scholar Tom Holm quips, "[i]f we Natives had been a bunch of pacifists, the American national saga of conquest would

3 Joking remark by an anonymous Ute man in Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*, 12.

have no great spiritual or symbolic meaning.”⁴ In this context, the historiography of Indigenous warfare has reflected colonial perspectives, frequently revolving around notions of primitivism and savagery.⁵ The discussion of Indigenous war-related traditions below draws on historical-anthropological perspectives from Native American studies since the 1970s because they detail these traditions as practices of sophisticated and complex societies, designed to integrate warfare into a specific cultural cosmos. They do not attempt to replace the image of the primitive brute with that of the noble savage, but highlight that Indigenous war-related cultural practices served (and still serve) to construct social cohesion and communal relationships, and that they reflected historical changes in cultural contact and conflict over time.

Regardless of regional cultural specializations in war-related traditions, many North American Indigenous cultures regarded war as a radical event beyond ordinary human experience and norms of behavior. Some, such as the Tohono O’odham of the Sonoran desert, understood it as a form of chaos, or even as outright insanity.⁶ With respect to its extraordinary qualities, Native societies have sought to compartmentalize war and war experience and to separate it from regular peacetime activities in order to prevent the effects of violence from spilling over into, or even dominating ordinary community life. This was usually done by rigidly framing war with preparatory, cleansing, honoring, and/or healing ceremonies to symbolize the twofold crossing of a line between order and chaos, as well as particular social institutions for war activities, such as war priests, war chiefs, and warrior sodalities.⁷ War-related ceremonies emphasized that this symbolic separation of—and the warriors’ transition between—war and peace was critical for their personality and identity, but also for their entire community: Warriors first needed to be prepared for the chaos of battle and the shock of violence and, upon their return, had to be cleansed, welcomed and reintegrated into a peace-oriented social cosmos. Communities had to prepare themselves for casualties. When the warriors returned from battle, the communities acknowledged their own responsibility for sending them into harm’s way, helped the warriors interpret their actions in the context of tribal cosmology and group identity and, on a practical level, finding a place for the returnees to

4 Qtd. in Schmidt, “Indians in the Military.” Cf. also Holm, “Strong Hearts: Native Service,” 138; Usbeck, “Fighting”; Usbeck, “Selling.”

5 Cf. Turney-High, *Primitive War*; Keeley, *War Before Civilization*; LeBlanc, *Constant Battles*.

6 Holm, “Culture,” 243.

7 Holm, 243.

contribute their experience for the benefit of the group.⁸ The community was responsible for collective meaning-making and for the construction of collective memory regarding war, but also for helping veterans make sense of their individual experience and to employ this experience for their postwar lives. In doing so, both sides generated cultural knowledge and negotiated values and norms by following particular scripts addressing their mutual responsibilities, services, and relationships.

At the closing of the frontier in the 1890s, the era of the ‘Indian wars’ and intertribal warfare had ended. US-Indian policy exerted pressure on the tribes to assimilate into the white mainstream, that is, to abandon cultural identity and customs. Tribes no longer had immediate opportunities to continue war-related cultural practices, and reservation officials actively suppressed tribal ceremonies.⁹ However, as with all wars since the founding of the US, Native American individuals often participated in the wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in much larger proportions than other ethnic groups relative to their population numbers.¹⁰ Their contributions to these military campaigns, as the above motto ironically put it, allowed the tribes to “continue [their] warrior ways” because the wars offered opportunities to renew tribal military traditions. This development created a unique relationship between Native Americans and the US military. In the words of Al Carroll whose comprehensive study investigates this relationship’s complex impact on both Indigenous and non-Native cultures and perceptions of war, “American Indians used military institutions to preserve, protect, defend, and revive Native cultures, institutions, and spiritual and cultural practices”¹¹ so that these military traditions are still—or, where they had been dormant during the early twentieth century, once more—practiced today.¹²

8 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 85–93; Holm, “Culture,” 246; Holm, “PTSD,” 84.

9 See Ellis, “We Don’t Want Your Rations, We Want This Dance” for a study on Indigenous resistance to the pressure of assimilation during the Reservation era, and how these conflicts led to cultural adaptation and to the secularization of some war-related traditions.

10 See United States. Veterans Administration, “American Indian and Alaska Native Servicemembers and Veterans,” especially 4–5.

11 Carroll, *Medicine Bags*, 2.

12 Holm published a number of articles and books on the development of Indigenous traditions in correlation with twentieth-century US warfare, e.g., *Strong Hearts*; “PTSD”; “American Indian Warfare.” William Meadows contributed extensive accounts on the revival and pan-tribal dissemination of southern Plains warrior sodalities and ceremonies, e.g., *Kiowa*; *Kiowa Military Societies*. The continuation of these traditions has also been addressed in museum exhibitions and popular nonfiction books, cf.

This section is, thus, informed by how Native American societies today follow these traditional scripts of ceremonially separating war and peace. It explores how they perceive the warriors' individual—and often traumatic—experience, how warriors and their communities negotiate its impact on the warriors' personalities, its repercussions on the relationship between warriors/veterans and their communities and, thus, what cultural knowledge this relationship generates. This is relevant because non-Native activist discourse relies on scholarship about Native soldiers of the twentieth century. Tom Holm, for example, analyzed the role of war-related ceremonies for the reintegration and culturally specific mental health care of Native Vietnam veterans and, thus, pioneered the field of Indigenous veteran and war studies.¹³ The readings of milblogs and homecoming scenarios in the following chapters draw on notions of community support and relationships in both scholarship and activist discourse to highlight their functional equivalencies with these traditions and to contextualize the cultural work of narrative practices in their specific cultural background.¹⁴

In this regard, it is critical to bear the role of cosmology in mind in the respective war-related cultural contexts. Most of the activist texts discussed in the sections below acknowledge the cultural specificity of Indigenous traditions. However, their frequently expressed notions of a universality of war experience allow many activists to engage in cultural transfer, that is, to inspect Indigenous war-related traditions for aspects and practices that might serve veteran reintegration and military psychology in non-Native cultural contexts. The following discussion of Native military traditions also correlates with discourses on the relationship between soldiers and civil society and the notion of social equilibrium in renegotiating and affirming the social contract through ceremonial storytelling in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. My discussion of Indigenous military traditions should, thus, be read in relation to abstract and highly symbolic concepts and ideas about war experience, personality, and group identity that invite cultural comparison to equivalent discourses in non-Native US society.

Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*; Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*; Clevenger, *America's First Warriors*.

13 Holm, "PTSD," 83–84.

14 Especially Chapter Four follows the three-step outline to investigate how military psychology interprets the effects of war experience on soldiers' personality and on civil-military relationships; the chapter's readings of milblogs details how bloggers and their (generally) civilian audience debate these aspects, as well.

Individual Experience

Because war is usually understood as an extraordinary event that might cause enormous psychological stress among its participants as well as their social environment, it is not surprising that many Native American cultures attribute considerable symbolic significance to individual warrior experience. This significance results from the need to protect both the warriors from the long-term effects of their experience beyond the threshold between war and peace and to protect their communities from the social and spiritual turmoil resulting from the warriors' violent experience. At the same time, to recognize the warriors' liminality acknowledges the opportunities in addition to the dangers of war experience. Returning warriors are considered to bring back insider knowledge about both order and chaos. Their extreme experiences, in the eyes of their communities, taught them about the fragility of order and human life, and they are now expected to use that knowledge to protect order and life back home. This cognition has often been bought dearly and is frequently fraught with grief, horror, loss, and guilt; Indigenous communities work with veterans to help them transform their experience into memories that, ultimately, allow the individual to contribute his or her experience for the benefit of the community and thus reinstate order and equilibrium within the group. This form of acknowledgment of the warrior's experience and sacrifices, along with "moral and material sustenance,"¹⁵ is often ceremonially expressed by the community's women who, during particular dances, wear their husbands' or sons' warrior insignia or items captured from the enemy to symbolize the absorption of war experience by the community, thereby acknowledging responsibility as well as expressing pride.¹⁶

The notion of the threshold, thus, gains such symbolic power because it marks the distinction between life and death as well as between order and chaos, on a personal psychological level, but also in terms of collective identity, social order, and spirituality. While this worldview acknowledges how war experience disrupts an individual warrior's personality development, it also interprets war experience as a contribution to the cultural integrity of the community.¹⁷ As Holm states, Native American cultures are, thus, among the few human societies that "treat [war experience] positively."¹⁸ In contrast, most cultures have come

15 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 123.

16 Carocci, *Warriors*, 123–24; Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*, 185–208.

17 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 40, 44–45.

18 Holm, "PTSD," 85. As discussed above, the emphasis on cultural integrity derives from the unique systems of ritualized intertribal warfare in which a constant state of war with traditional enemies served as a controlled outlet of aggression and as a means to

to focus on the clinical and moral aspects of war experience and thus treat it primarily as a burden, enhanced in US discourse by the prevalence of debates about high PTSD and suicide rates since Vietnam which, as some scholars observe, leads many people to victimize all veterans.¹⁹ In conjunction with an increasing public abhorrence of war in late twentieth-century 'Western' societies as a reaction to the excesses of nationalistic militarism during the first half of the century, debates on PTSD since Vietnam often helped construct war experience as pathological per se. In this sense, scholarly perspectives in Native American studies avoid stereotypical readings of warfare at both ends of the scale: By emphasizing that individual war experience, albeit dangerous and extreme, can be an asset to a community if it is negotiated in elaborate culture-specific ceremonies, Holm's and others' works refute the notion of primitivism, savagery, and militaristic machismo in Indigenous cultures, and they also forestall tendencies to pathologize war experience in general.

Pursuing such a balanced cultural approach, studies of Native American warrior traditions explain the impact of war experience on Native veterans' status in tribal societies with the concept of 'age acceleration.' This notion posits that learning about the fragility of life and social order by crossing the threshold between peace and war not only disrupts personality development, but also carries the potential for a maturation process within the individual that might prove beneficial for the community.²⁰ This is not to suggest that, historically, Native American masculinity could only be expressed through war, or that young men could only gain social status as warriors, nor that warrior roles were exclusively male affairs, but that warfare was regarded as a unique way of maturing and gaining status by acquiring specific experience and outlooks on life under extraordinary circumstances.²¹ Young warriors are confronted with death, they witness and inflict death on others at primarily similar young age while encounters with death are ordinarily associated with old age.²² This extraordinary experience, thus, causes young warriors to "think about, in some cases focus on, mortality."²³ The sudden proximity of death, forcibly becoming aware of one's own mortality, and the corresponding conclusions on the mortality

reassure group identity, rather than as a vehicle for extermination. See Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 38–45.

19 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 10–13.

20 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 7, 40.

21 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 41, 44, 67; Carroll, *Medicine Bags*, 208.

22 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 7.

23 Holm, "Culture," 246.

of one's relatives and peers are believed to teach young warriors how to make responsible decisions to protect the integrity of their community. Combat experience "transforms the youthful naive fledgling warrior into a hardened professional, old beyond his or her actual age."²⁴ As psychologists John P. Wilson and Steven M. Silver argue, warriors thus gain a "new perspective on self and the world" that the home community must help interpret and put into context.²⁵ The Native veterans' communities often acknowledge this maturation and contextualization by granting them heightened social status and trusting them to employ their experience in new positions within the tribal social structure.

War experience poses a danger to both its bearers and to the communities to which they return; it necessitates cleansing to protect both the veteran and the community. Yet, Holm cites a Winnebago elder to emphasize that ceremonies also signify trust and appreciation of the veterans' experience: "We honor our veterans for their bravery and because by seeing death on the battlefield they truly know the greatness of life."²⁶ Thus, as Silver and Wilson observe, warriors carry "uniquely acquired wisdom"²⁷ when they return from beyond the threshold. Describing the traditions of the Cherokee, Holm elucidates the significance of war experience for both warriors and communities: Before the Reservation Era, young Cherokee men were neither involved in vital economic nor social functions within their communities, while women gained status through child-rearing and through their positions in the matrilineal social structure of the communities. Leaving the community to go to war was a traditional way to gain status for Cherokee men, not simply by proving one's commitment to protecting the community, but also by one's willingness to learn from dreadful experiences. Upon their return, the warriors underwent rituals to inform their elders about their exploits who then helped them interpret their experiences in the context of tribal cosmology and culture. The knowledge thus gained gave the returnees heightened social status, promised social rewards, and opened previously inaccessible functions and positions in the tribal social order.²⁸

As postcolonial Indigenous scholarly perspectives insist, these traditions were embedded in a system of highly ritualized intertribal warfare that entailed frequent raiding, but rarely decisive battles and wars of extinction, resulting in

24 Holm, "PTSD," 85.

25 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 343.

26 Holm, "PTSD," 85.

27 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 342.

28 Holm, "Culture," 247.

relatively few casualties up until the late nineteenth century. Thus, war did not threaten the existence of tribal communities per se.²⁹ However, notions of age acceleration through war experience permeate Native North American military traditions regarding Indigenous participation in US wars since the twentieth century. Holm describes practices of maturation through separation from the community among contemporary traditional Cherokees in which not only military service, but also migrant labor and alternating phases of urban and reservation life serve contemporary young men to gain status.³⁰

In this context, it is important to regard the ongoing disputes between Indigenous scholarly perspectives on the one hand, and many historians and anthropologists on the other. These disputes concern the degree of ritualization, compartmentalization, and restraint—and, ultimately, mortality—in intertribal warfare, but they also call tribal societies' capability to organize a complex military infrastructure and to engage in decisive battles into question. While Indigenous perspectives criticize notions of “primitive” tribal war as perpetuating the stereotypical imagery of savages, their emphasis on levels of restraint in tribal warfare is sometimes refuted in turn as politically opportunist invocations of the noble savage.³¹ To use an example relevant to psychological perspectives on war experience, the idea of age acceleration has been used to portray tribal warfare as a brutish, unrestrained, and primitive affair. Robert Laufer distinguishes between a presumed primarily ‘Western’ perception that war is “out of the range of normal human experience,”³² apparently leading nation-states throughout history toward increasing attempts to restrain it, and a vaguely

29 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 27; Dyer, *War*, 6–9.

30 Holm, “Culture,” 247. Some activist scholars invoke postcolonial theory in this regard to warn against subscribing to militaristic and, by implication, imperialistic US policies, in order to preserve Native war-related cultural practices. They posit that contemporary tribes should place more emphasis on alternative ways of maturation and age acceleration. In this reading, the US military poses an inherent threat of engendering a colonial attitude among Native soldiers, and it potentially supports American imperialist practices that have victimized Native nations since first contact. To support tribal self-determination and Indigenous self-consciousness, Al Carroll suggests a more central role for tribal police, firefighters, and rescue and health care services in tribal ceremonies because they provide similarly extreme experiences and engender similar community support, but are politically less ambivalent. Carroll, *Medicine Bags*, 227–28; cf. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers*.

31 Cf. Holm, “American Indian Warfare,” 154–55; Turney-High, *Primitive War*; LeBlanc, *Constant Battles*; Helbling, *Tribale Kriege*; Keeley, *War Before Civilization*.

32 Laufer, “Serial Self,” 35.

primordial ‘warriorhood’ based on masculine identity striving for dominance—both domestically and in intertribal warfare. This reading leads into precarious ideological territory. Laufer implicitly denies the possibility of war trauma in tribal warfare because, in emphasizing the interruption and fragmentation of the self through extraordinary experience, he premises sanctions against violence under normal circumstances in a civilized society. He implies that tribal societies were not peaceful, that tribal wars were anything but restrained, and that tribal warriors grew up in a culture where violence (both intra- and intertribally) was the primary means for men to vie for status. In this reading, ‘primitive’ warriors could not be traumatized by violence as they supposedly grew up immersed in it. Indigenous scholarly perspectives on tribal traditions such as the concept of age acceleration, thus, not only refute hierarchical ethnocentric thinking, they also appeal to non-Native activist discourse. Showing tribal war-related traditions as viable ways to negotiate the extraordinary psychological and social effects of war experience in a complex society, they seem to invite cultural comparison and notions of universality much more than the clear hierarchical binary relation of ‘primitive’ versus ‘civilized.’

Personality

If war experience means that warriors gain a “new perspective on self and the world,”³³ they have not only acquired experience and wisdom, but their experience might have affected their personality dramatically. Ceremonies for returning warriors, therefore, not only serve to reintegrate them into the social structure but address changes in self-perception, as well. War experience, in that sense, confronts warriors with extraordinary events but, on a more fundamental level, it radically questions the warriors’ learned behavior and codes of conduct. The sudden proximity of death uproots the social order to which the primarily young warrior has grown accustomed during childhood and adolescence. Warrior readjustment requires the relearning of and return to these social norms and codes of behavior while, at the same time, coming to terms with the memory of death and chaos.³⁴ Native American war-related rituals are, thus, supposed to make the transition between war and peace, the twofold crossing of the threshold, less destructive for the individual warrior’s sense of self. Integrating the cultural context in their developmental-psychology perspective, Silver and Wilson conclude that these transitional rituals “decondition the intense emotions produced and

33 Silver and Wilson, “Native American,” 343.

34 Laufer, “Serial Self,” 36.

learned in combat. Ritual purification, embedded in cultural meaning, begins a process of transformation in identity and role expectation.”³⁵

In her study on ceremonial “war talk” among Vietnam veterans of Indigenous cultures on the northern Plains, Theresa O’Neill observes elements of ritual narration that further highlight the significance of personality development through war experience. She differentiates between *iglata*, a “paradigmatically joking”³⁶ form of Native veteran talk, and *waktoglaka*, which she identifies as critical for readjustment and for overcoming traumatic experience. *Iglata*, connoting “to brag in excess”³⁷ in the tribal language, is a form of war talk where veterans share stories that are supposed to be funny or to evoke fear. It primarily occurs among peers in the same age group, often in a very informal setting and involving alcohol. However, *iglata* is not relevant to the Native veteran’s position in the community, and it does not reveal essential personal information about the veteran. In contrast, *waktoglaka* is performed in a formal setting for an intergenerational audience. The narrator shares intimate and personal insight and, by doing so, negotiates how his battle experience affected his personality and relationship with the community in interaction with the audience. O’Neill argues that in *waktoglaka*, as opposed to *iglata*, narrators speak “in the voice of mature(d) men.”³⁸ O’Neill discusses male veterans; her study does not provide insight into whether and how social roles and relationships of female warriors would change, both in tribal tradition and in participation in the contemporary, gender-integrated US military. Obviously, gender roles and tribal traditions of masculinity are influential factors here, but a deep discussion of Indigenous masculinity would be beyond the scope of this study, especially since my focus on the discourse about war experience emphasizes the relationship and frictions between soldiers, veterans, and civilians, rather than along gender lines. However, Native American studies have increasingly begun to analyze notions and roles of masculinity in historical and contemporary Indigenous cultures, and their discussion is bound to interweave with new military history and veteran studies in the future.³⁹

35 Silver and Wilson, “Native American,” 343.

36 O’Neill, “Coming Home,” 454.

37 O’Neill, 450.

38 O’Neill, 455.

39 In German American studies, Matthias Voigt is currently working on a dissertation thesis at Frankfurt University to explore, among others, the interrelations of masculinity and warrior-veteran status among Native activists of the Red Power era

The voice change between the two forms of war talk observed by O'Neill, as well as the shift from a joking to a formal, ceremonial setting demonstrate the veterans' maturation—not simply because they have gleaned wisdom from extreme experience, but because they acknowledge the change in self-perception by taking new responsibilities for the group:

As formal, tragic, and sacred talk, *waktoglaka* shifts the identity of the speaker from young man to elder, thereby transforming war experience from an experience that is limited in its significance to a given time and place to an experience that encompasses what it means to be a “real” Indian and what it means to be a “real” man.⁴⁰

From a ‘Western’ perspective, we could read *waktoglaka* as a form of individual purification by way of catharsis, similar to the multitude of war novels and autobiographies that portray war experience as a rite of passage, or in the tradition of the *bildungsroman*. However, O'Neill warns that employing the concepts of Western psychology one-to-one to discuss Indigenous cultural practices such as *iglatá* and *waktoglaka* precludes a comprehension of their cultural significance. *Waktoglaka* represents a specific form of cultural knowledge about warriorhood and veteran reintegration, it is a specific cultural practice engendered through such knowledge, and it circulates meaning and values in a culturally specific way and in relation to tribal cosmology, that is, the cultural understanding how tangible and intangible powers are linked to warfare and to aspects of war experience.⁴¹ O'Neill argues that the individual's ability to come to terms with war experience depends less on purification through merely formal narration than on the negotiation of a new relationship between the individual veteran and the community within their cultural context, and this negotiation is expressed through ritual scripts in the discursive context of war-related ceremonies.⁴² To a large extent, then, the question about the impact of war experience on a warrior's personality depends on social support and on that warrior's relationships to his or her community.

Warriorhood as a Relationship

Holm makes an intriguing observation in his study of culture-specific readjustment and stress reduction among Native veterans after the Vietnam War,

(*WT Native American Warrior Heroes during the Red Power Era: Between Indigenous Traditions and American Nationalism, 1969–1978*). Cf. also McKegney, *Masculindians*.

40 O'Neill, “Coming Home,” 456.

41 Cf. Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 37–45, 84–93.

42 O'Neill “Coming Home,” 442–43.

emphasizing a significant distinction between warriorhood and soldiering. Traditional Native American warriorhood was “not as much a social role as it was a relationship with the rest of the community.”⁴³ ‘Western’ soldiers, he argues, are primarily seen as servants of the state, i.e., as “functionaries of a larger, very impersonal institution rather than as contributors to the contiguous community,”⁴⁴ and their relationship to their country, their branch of service, or their unit gains importance over relationships to family and community while they fulfill their role. In this respect, Native American Vietnam veterans undergoing war-related ceremonies had better chances to cope with, or even recover from war stress than their fellow non-Native soldiers. In addition to their role as US soldiers, they were also warriors, that is, many entertained and ceremonially renewed their relationship with their community after their return.⁴⁵ This notion of a perpetual relationship is further enhanced by the social structure of many Native tribes. It defines and regulates social status and interaction through kinship relations which often serve as substitute for blood relations and, thus, facilitates mutual responsibilities and closer bonds between individuals who are not immediate family. Returning warriors, therefore, have obligations and can expect support from both their families, clans, and wider community based on these close-knit social relationships. In this view, non-Native soldiering primarily constitutes a social role that, for many Vietnam veterans, could not bridge the gap or ease the transition between war and peace, nor prevent a general feeling of abandonment and alienation from society, even if the veteran’s relations to his immediate family could be restored after his return.⁴⁶

In addition, the function of soldiering in most ‘Western’ societies is defined as protecting the state against external, and in some cases also domestic, enemies by use of force. With only a few exceptions, such as first aid during natural catastrophes, other functions and other forms of protection are reserved

43 Holm, “PTSD,” 84.

44 Holm, 84.

45 Holm, “PTSD,” 84. However, studies report the prevalence of PTSD and other war-related psychological problems among Indigenous veterans in higher proportions than among white veterans. United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service, “Mental Health,” 84–85.

46 Holm refers to the seminal study *Legacies of Vietnam* to muse on similarities in social support and social absorption through a veteran’s community between Native American tribes and non-Native rural communities to further emphasize the role of relationships between veterans and their community for stress reduction. Holm, “Culture,” 248; Egendorf, *Legacies of Vietnam*, 278–79.

for different public and nongovernment institutions, such as police, firefighters, diplomats, as well as health care and social services. Traditional Native American notions of warriors protecting their communities are attuned to the close-knit, kinship-oriented social structure of the tribes. They go beyond the narrow confines of soldiering, and encompass many of the additional functions outlined above. The following oral-history account of a frontier-era Navajo warrior is worth citing at length as it elucidates the broad perception of warriorhood as a dedication to community service and, consequently, the relationships between warriors and their communities:

In Navajo, a warrior means someone who can get through the snowstorm when no one else can. In Navajo, a warrior is the one that doesn't get the flu when everyone else does—the only one walking around, making a fire for the sick, giving them medicine, feeding them food, making them strong to fight the flu. In Navajo, a warrior is the one who can use words so everyone knows they are part of the same family. In Navajo, a warrior says what is in the people's hearts. Talks about what the land means to them. Brings them together to fight for it.⁴⁷

This statement entails many of Holm's elements of distinguishing the roles of soldiers from the relationships of warriors. It makes clear that warriorhood encompasses more responsibilities toward the community than the mere protective use of force. Although, like the often macho and hypermasculine depictions of soldiers in 'Western' cultural expressions, it emphasizes strength and prowess, this notion of warriorhood portrays the warrior first as a selfless caregiver, provider, orator, diplomat, mediator, motivator, and, only in the last instance, as a fighter.

If we thus perceive warriorhood as a relationship, the cultural significance of ceremonies to welcome, cleanse, and honor returning veterans becomes clearer as their reciprocal function gains more emphasis. The community guides veterans back into the realm of order and peace and cleanses them to protect both veterans and civilians from the taint of violence. Community members thank the veterans for their sacrifice and their willingness to share their hard-earned experience. Yet, the ceremonies also mark the warriors' commitment to culturally specific customs and practices by honoring their relationships. Their participation in both war and ceremonies, therefore, constitutes a promise to protect and uphold cultural identity.⁴⁸ Both sides demonstrate their faithfulness to the social contract, the reciprocal commitment to protection and support.⁴⁹

47 Bighorse, *Bighorse the Warrior*, xxiv.

48 Holm, "Culture," 246; O'Neill, "Coming Home," 457.

49 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 342.

The relationships between warriors and their communities become evident in diverse facets of historical and contemporary Native community life. Military societies and sodalities have institutionalized reciprocal support for centuries and—despite organizational, functional, and formal adaptations since the late nineteenth century—provide opportunities for warriors to serve in both military, spiritual, economic, and social roles today. This interdependence and interweaving of functions enhances “tribal integration,” as William Meadows has it.⁵⁰ Unlike ‘Western’ customs of gift exchange, the honored veterans (or their families) in many tribal ceremonies do not receive gifts but rather hand out presents to those who facilitated their accomplishments (or to anyone in need), which demonstrates a change in social status of the honored, shows the sense of mutual obligations and gratitude and, at the same time, strengthens relationships through reciprocal economic and social support.⁵¹ The fraternity and bonds among war veterans and warriors are a common theme, particularly among Native military societies, and they tie in with the emphasis on relationships between warriors and their communities. The current initiative Project Moccasin adapted an old war-related tradition. While relatives used to prepare moccasins and protective, sacred items for warriors departing to war in the past, this role is now filled by Native veterans in this project, fulfilling their obligation to share their experience and to serve as role models and mentors.⁵²

To illustrate warrior relationships in a final current example, consider the website and accompanying DVD “Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing,” published by the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) within the US Department of Health and Human Services.⁵³ The guide to both the website and the DVD offers examples of writing but also “facilitation questions” designed both to help Indigenous veterans record stories, accustom relatives to using these narratives to understand their own veterans’ experience, and to provide cues and discussion prompts for educators. These questions vividly discuss relationships between veterans, their families and communities.⁵⁴ They encourage contributors to consider and describe changes in their own relationships during the transition from civilian to Native soldier to veteran, and they advise readers/viewers to look for these descriptions in the narratives in which they are about to

50 Meadows, *Kiowa*, 10.

51 Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*, 195.

52 Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*, 201, 205.

53 “Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing.”

54 The website speaks of “roles,” rather than relationships, but the context makes clear that it refers to functions/roles within relationships.

engage and to contextualize them with the cultural or tribal background of the veteran storyteller.

These observations on Native American practices illustrate that many tribal societies have found ways to reintegrate returning warriors and to employ the veterans' experience in new, often leading positions and functions within the tribal structure. The integration of the veterans' war experience in the diplomatic and judiciary tasks of tribal peace chiefs is a case in point.⁵⁵ Similarly, charity, healing and education, often institutionalized in military societies, point to a utilization of war experience for civilian tasks.⁵⁶

These discussions of war experience, personality, and relationships in Native American warrior traditions and current practices elucidate common responses to war experience expressed in a specific cultural context. The following section explores recent engagement with Native military traditions in non-Native discourse on war experience and discusses how current US military psychology and civic activists seek to incorporate these elements of warrior tradition into their own social, community-oriented approaches to veteran reintegration and therapy, promoting Indigenous traditions as role models for non-Native practice. These examples of transcultural references make apparent the anxiety and cultural pessimism within discourses about civil-military relationships. They also set the stage to explain the philosophical ideas behind civic engagement in milblogs' comment sections and in homecoming scenarios.

Role Modeling Indigenous Traditions in Psychology and Veterans' Affairs

*Lessons from the Chiefs of Old.*⁵⁷

As Sebastian Junger states, the study of Indigenous war-related traditions and ceremonies reveals to many non-Native observers a "spirit of community healing and connection" that they find lacking in their own culture's practices of veteran reintegration and negotiation of war experience. Joining a host of similar

55 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 38, 40.

56 See Wilson, "Culture-Specific Pathways to Healing and Transformation for War Veterans Suffering PTSD," 56–57, for a description of the Lakota Red Feather ceremony during which wounded veterans pledge to serve as caregivers for elders, while the community promises financial support in exchange. This ceremony constitutes the veterans' spiritual healing by transforming them into "generative healers" themselves.

57 Chapter title in Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 175.

activist statements, he concludes that modern society “might draw on”⁵⁸ these Indigenous traditions to reform and improve their own. Similarly, psychologist and mythologist Edward Tick dedicates an entire chapter to Indigenous war-related traditions in *Warrior's Return* to promote a philosophy of ceremonial, community-oriented veteran reintegration in US society anchored around warriorhood and mutual aid. These observations and suggestions are informed by a number of interrelated concepts and ideas, such as historical traditions of cultural pessimism in the US, notions of universality regarding war experience, and the influence of mythological and literary archetypes on the discourse about war.

The extensive reflections on Indigenous warrior traditions in non-Native discourse express traditional anxieties in American culture that link negotiations of modernity with colonization and national identity. After the official closing of the frontier in 1890, Frederick Jackson Turner's influential Frontier Theory argued that the American environment had forced European settlers to go back to the most ‘primitive’ states of humankind, to use the most primitive tools for subsistence, and that it took away their more refined European traditions. In short, “the wilderness master[ed] the colonist.”⁵⁹ Similarly, Theodore Roosevelt praised “barbarian virtues”⁶⁰ which the American character should retain and defend against the influence of what Matthew Frye Jacobson ironically calls “effete overcivilization.”⁶¹ According to Jacobson, US self-perception around 1900 suffered from the “deep irony”⁶² that civilization seemed the driver of American culture and colonialist expansion. Civilization was portrayed as an ideal to which Euro-Americans, the Natives whose land they colonized, as well as newly arriving immigrants should strive. Yet, this very ideal seemed to carry within it the root of decay and decadence, manifest in the material wealth, amenities, and splendor of industrialized cities. In effect, US society sought to eradicate Native Americans’ ‘primitivism’ at the same time that it praised primitive traits as cornerstones of American character.

This irony becomes apparent where Euro-Americans promoted Native American culture as role models for self-improvement throughout history. One case seems particularly relevant for this discussion of transcultural role modeling

58 Junger, *Tribe*, 121.

59 Turner, *Frontier and Section*, 39.

60 Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 51.

61 Jacobson, 3.

62 Jacobson, 3.

in the context of war experience and community relationships. John Collier, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs during Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, had become fascinated with Native American culture while developing a philosophy of social reform based on communality in the early 1900s.⁶³ He praised Native people's "personality-forming institutions, even now unweakened, which had survived repeated and immense historical shocks, and which were going right on in the productions of states of mind, attitudes of mind, earth-loyalties and human loyalties, amid a context of beauty which suffused all the life of the group."⁶⁴ Collier is referring to the history of oppression and forced assimilation to which the US subjected Native nations, and through which their cultural focus on communal ways of living persisted. He adds: "[I]t might be that only the Indians, among the peoples of this hemisphere at least, were still the possessors and users of the fundamental secret of human life—the secret of building great personality through the instrumentality of social institutions."⁶⁵ In his emphasis on the power of social institutions, a parallel with the major thrust in contemporary community-oriented discourse on war experience and trauma becomes evident: In times of crisis, soul-searching in US society seems to resort to notions of primordial communality, unveiling the "irony" in national character, i.e., the perpetual rivalry between rugged individualism and self-reliance on the one hand, and communality, collaboration, and mutual aid on the other.

This recurrent cultural pessimism has resurfaced in the discourse on war experience since Vietnam, where activists engage in transcultural role modeling to learn from Native American traditions how "great personality" can be built from war experience "through the instrumentality of social institutions," to use Collier's words. Since Vietnam, these activist references also seem to have become more frequent and embedded in academic debates as Native American studies have become a popular field in the humanities since the 1980s, and because studies on Native American veterans have boosted research on cultural, social, and ethnic aspects of military psychology and veteran studies since Vietnam.⁶⁶

63 Prucha, foreword to *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* by Kenneth Philp.

64 Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 126.

65 Collier, 126.

66 For examples of sociological and psychological research among Indigenous (veteran) communities, see, among others, Bassett, Buchwald, and Manson, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Symptoms among American Indians and Alaska Natives"; United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service, "Mental Health"; Gurley et al., "Comparative Use of Biomedical Services"; Brooks et al., "Reaching Rural Communities with Culturally Appropriate Care"; Dillard et al., "Conduct

These activist voices have also become more self-conscious and critical of colonial perspectives in their comparative efforts.

In addition, many cross-cultural references emerge from the notion that the experience of war and violence has universal attributes which presumably resurface across cultures and across time. This is due in part to 'Western' traditions of evolutionary thinking, the presumption that human development is linear, that societies evolved from a common human 'origin point' and that, consequently, an 'advanced' society need only study 'primitive' cultures in order to learn more about its own forgotten origins, among them, its members' psychological response to war. Bolstering this notion of universality is the widespread acknowledgment of the hero archetype in academic and literary discussions of war and war narratives. These works frequently integrate Joseph Campbell's comparative mythology and his promotion of the archetypal hero figure into their arguments.⁶⁷

In the context of ceremonial storytelling, the hero archetype gains even more importance. Not only does it occur in so many narratives well-known and well-received among proponents of community-oriented veteran reintegration, but the stories are also assertive metanarratives. They feature a hero going off to war, surviving ordeals, and returning as a matured man who literally 'lived to tell the tale.' In doing so, they prescribe the relationships between soldiers/warriors and their communities. To complete the journey, the hero cannot simply return, he must also tell the tale, and his community needs to be there to hear and bear witness to it. Many Native American ceremonies or elements of ceremonies, such as the formal war talk described by O'Neill, or the mimed representation of a Plains warrior's experience in counting 'coup,' symbolically negotiate the relationship between a warrior and his or her community through narrative.⁶⁸ Non-Native

Disorder"; Gross, "Assisting"; Hobbs, "VA and IHS"; Kaufmann et al., "Tribal Veterans Representative (TVR) Training Program"; Kramer et al., "Do Correlates of Dual Use"; Noe et al., "Providing Culturally Competent Services"; Reifel et al., "American Indian Veterans' Views about Their Choices in Health Care"; Scurfield, "Healing the Warrior"; Ross, *American Indians at Risk*.

67 Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*; Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 18; Tick, *Warrior's Return*, xvi.

68 In counting 'coup' on an enemy in battle, a warrior gains prestige and spiritual power by touching the enemy with his bare hands or with a special sacred item, or by taking the enemy's weapons away from him in close combat. Upon return from battle, the deed is discussed, evaluated and affirmed by fellow warriors, sometimes by the whole community, in a ceremony. When the event is reenacted in a ceremonial dance or narrated in ceremonial war talk, the acquired spiritual power is enhanced further, as

observers of transhistorical and transcultural aspects of war experience see a node to transfer presumably universal knowledge from the Indigenous cultural context to their own in order to restore what they perceive as a broken relationship between soldiers/veterans and civil society.⁶⁹ Telling stories of war to a responsive and affirmative civilian audience in a public setting is seen as a cornerstone for a number of community-oriented approaches in social work, psychology, and psychotherapy. Yet, even disregarding these explicit civic activist engagements, the chapters below argue that these Indigenous cultural practices also open an avenue to understand other forms of ‘war talk’ in non-Native US society. When we read milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of ceremonial storytelling, it will become clear that both they and the Indigenous ceremonies employ the same discursive context, conducting cultural work in their respective cultural contexts and cosmologies. They constitute community and (re)assert the relationship between civilians and those who wage war on behalf of civil society.

Civil-Military Relationships and Non-Native ‘Warriors’

The following discussion selects particular aspects of cultural comparison to carve out how Indigenous traditions inform non-Native civic activism and how they sharpen the analytic lens on non-Native narrative practices in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. First, it explores how the reference to Native practices among civic activists serves to portray civil-military relationships as part of the

is the enemy’s humiliation. In ceremonies following twentieth-century wars, Native American soldiers and their communities counted coup with items captured from enemy soldiers, such as flags, weapons, or pieces of military equipment. Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 93–94; Holm, “Strong Hearts: Native Service,” 135; Holm, “PTSD,” 84; Medicine Crow and Viola, *Counting Coup*, 107–17; Laubin and Laubin, *Indian Dances of North America*, 168.

69 To cite but a few examples, the activist self-help website Healing Combat Trauma lists philosophical, war-related quotes from historical Native American leaders, as well as texts on Indigenous traditions of communal trauma treatment. Casura, “Native Americans.” The University of Southern California’s Institute for Creative Technologies has been instrumental in developing trauma treatment options using virtual reality in recent years. Their project “Warriors’ Journey is one such activity that engages participants in stories to emphasize and reinforce common ideals of honorable warriors throughout history.” Morie, Haynes, and Chance, “Warriors’ Journey,” 17. The project employs warrior stories from North America and around the world to help clients find access to cathartic narrative approaches to healing.

social contract and how activists, thus, demand that civil society take a more active role in veteran reintegration to reciprocate for the veterans' contributions. Second, it returns to the notion of warriorhood and discusses in how far the frequent and public depiction of US soldiers and veterans as 'warriors' affects non-Native discourse on civil-military relationships and war experience.

Unsurprisingly, the realization that Native Americans' cleansing, honoring and healing ceremonies work toward social reintegration and that they helped many Native Vietnam veterans cope with their experiences makes the cultural and therapeutic functions of such ceremonies all the more attractive to proponents of social psychology and communality in veterans' affairs. Activists focus on the cyclic sequence of narrating war experience and bearing witness as much as on ritualizing the narration. The cultural practices observed among Native Americans are, thus, not simply perceived as alternative treatments to individual psychological conditions, they seem to offer a blueprint for how a community could negotiate the relationship between its civilians and members of its military, and how assertions of this relationship serve to constitute the community's cultural integrity and cohesion. It is, therefore, critical to note the proponents' emphasis on spirituality in this cultural comparison as well as their interest in the rituality of these practices.

To cite a few brief examples of how contemporary activist psychologists utilize cultural comparison and criticism in their observations on civil-military relationships, consider Edward Tick's work. He has integrated Indigenous war-related philosophy into his therapeutic practice with US veterans. In his latest book on communal approaches to veteran reintegration, he employs an analogy to Plains tribes' traditions from the frontier era. Tribal warriors, he argues, were posted as lookouts in a line of defense along the periphery of the villages to protect their families in the center. After battle, the warriors returned to the village, that is, to the center:

Now the civilians gave thanks, honor and duty through tending their returning warriors. They became a circle of welcome. They witnessed their stories, grieved or celebrated with them, attended to their necessary purification and healing rituals. In mainstream society the survivor becomes a misunderstood outcast. In indigenous healing 'the man of the dreary edge becomes the center.'⁷⁰

Tick highlights the alternating sequence of taking up positions at the periphery and the center, of being protector and protected in Plains societies, that symbolize the mutual responsibilities of their members. He also criticizes "mainstream

70 Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 131.

society” for expecting soldiers to go to the periphery—i.e., to deploy to a war zone to protect US interests—without acknowledging its own responsibility to form a welcoming, protective, and healing circle around the veterans to aid their return. Obviously, his comparative perspective regards Indigenous social institutions for war as preferable to current US society’s practices, and he suggests that reforms in veteran reintegration should emulate the Indigenous role model to reestablish social equilibrium and to build “great personalities” among veterans, as John Collier mused decades earlier.

Tick further elaborates on his concept of alternating protective circles as he employs the gist of his Indigenous example to criticize contemporary US society. Bemoaning that the professional, all-volunteer US army no longer represents a cross-section of society, which allows most civilians to ignore military matters, he notes:

The proper relationship and implicit social contract between warriors and civilians are interchangeable concentric circles of protection and caring. Society is responsible for warriors’ well-being in preparation before, support during, and tending after conflict. This includes how any society uses its warriors, takes responsibility for their actions during [war] and provides for their well-being afterward.⁷¹

Tick adds examples from tribal societies around the world to state that the increasing social segregation of the US military from the rest of society obscures civil society’s responsibilities toward its “warriors,” which further isolates them and, as he cautions, precariously increases veterans’ stress levels upon return from war. He cites a Pend d’Orielle Vietnam veteran to make his point: “We must not only help the veterans but also educate nonveterans on their responsibilities if they let our leaders continue to start wars.”⁷² He expands his observations on culture-specific practices to the universal level by arguing that the sequence of reciprocal protection and support in these practices constitutes a “healthy social order.”⁷³ Turning his attention to Vietnam, to the high numbers of psychological injuries among US soldiers, and, implicitly, to the general social, psychological, and political outline of civil-military relationships, Tick understands war-related psychological injury as much as a matter of battle experience as of homecoming. US society’s failure to form protective circles around its returning veterans increases their moral and emotional predicament, he posits:

71 Tick, 120.

72 qtd. in Tick, 121.

73 Tick, 131.

In contrast, countless Americans who served in our politically and economically motivated wars feel broken because they betrayed the warrior's purpose and code, because the war was not unquestionably and purely defensive, because society and the government refused their tending tasks and judged and blamed veterans for their psychological problems afterward, and because both government and citizenry refuted collective responsibility. For all these reasons American troops experience that only they and not their country went to war.⁷⁴

Derived from Tick's examples of Native traditions, US civil society and its social contract are clearly at the center of his conclusions about PTSD and his approach to therapy. Tick is particularly adamant in his emphasis on how moral aspects of political (or economic) decisions over war affect soldiers' psyches. Not all proponents of Indigenous role models for veteran reintegration follow this argumentation, even when they agree with his statements on civil society's responsibility for veterans within the social contract. However, many other activists voice similar concerns. Raymond Scurfield identifies a set of intertwined relationships relevant to veterans' mental health, one of them being veterans' relationships with representatives of their own government and civil society whose visible, sincere, and trustworthy commitment to veterans' well-being is necessary for social reintegration.⁷⁵ His ideas were inspired by a project on veteran reintegration through the engagement of elders, women, and priests among the Native tribes on the Plateau.⁷⁶

John Becknell takes up Tick's work at healing retreats for veterans, likening these retreats to the symbolic role reversal and mutual responsibilities in Native practice. Like Tick and Junger, he identifies the tradition of overt individualism in US society as part of the problem: "We have come to view individual rights as more important than communal responsibilities [...] Veterans return to a society that is so self-preoccupied it has no room to recognize that the suffering that follows them home from war is a social suffering that needs a communal bearing and holding, not just therapy and medication."⁷⁷ From his perspective on these therapeutic retreats, once more, Indigenous war-related practices of

74 Tick, 136.

75 Scurfield, "Innovative Healing Approaches." The other relationships relevant to his approach are ties among fellow veterans, and between veterans and nonveteran members of their social environments, such as family, friends, neighbors, or members of the same religion.

76 Scurfield, 5–7.

77 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 96.

mutual aid and communal responsibility appear preferable to the practices of modern US society.

Becknell also refers to Indigenous notions of age acceleration and the social absorption of war experience when he criticizes the blanket pathologizing of veterans in US society. Rather than as victims, he argues, returning veterans should be considered “bearers of gifts” from whom US civil society could learn.⁷⁸ Proponents of community-based veteran support thus pursue ways through which civil society explicitly, symbolically, and ceremonially fulfills the “sacred covenant” by telling veterans “we are responsible for you, for what you did and for the consequences.”⁷⁹ Having participated as a civilian volunteer witness in Tick’s experimental retreats for traumatized veterans, Becknell envisions a ceremonial welcome message presented to returning veterans. Its symbolism resembles the functions and cultural work of Native American cleansing and honoring ceremonies:

We’ve been waiting for you. Welcome home. We needed your military service and are deeply grateful for your sacrifice. Now, we need what you bring home—your warriorhood, your triumphs and losses, your wounds of body and soul, your heroism, your doubts, your haunting fears, your nightmares, your disillusionment, your boredom, your burdens—we need it all. You have been where we will never go. Those of us who did not go need to hear you and be with you.⁸⁰

Once more, this proposed welcoming ritual transfers Indigenous notions of mutual responsibility, as much as it promises veterans new social status, earned by hardships endured on behalf of society. In addressing society’s “need” for what veterans “bring home,” this message also introduces the notion of continued service beyond battle, that is, it adopts Indigenous conceptualizations of warriorhood as a relationship that goes beyond the social role of professional soldiering, as discussed above.

Similar calls to action (if less focused on spirituality) abound in public discourse. On a Marines’ support website, one Colonel Tim Hanifen, recently returned from Iraq, suggested in 2003 that “understanding, affirmation, and support” were “gifts” society could give to veterans that would “last them a

78 Becknell, 54–61.

79 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 237.

80 Becknell, “Listening to Narratives of War,” 2. In the same vein, Sebastian Junger concludes from his examples of Native American ceremonial traditions that US society should construct their own civic ceremonies for veterans where they share their experience with civilians in order to “finally return the experience of war to our entire nation, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought.” Junger, *Tribes*, 123.

lifetime.”⁸¹ Psychologist Jonathan Shay, in turn, proposes “religious and cultural therapies”⁸² because they reaffirm belonging and group (e.g., cultural, national) identity. He suggests that these therapies be comprised of rituals for entire communities to publicly assert group cohesion and to symbolize veterans’ reentrance into their community:

I believe this is something to be done jointly by people from all our religions, from the arts, from the mental health professions, and from the ranks of combat veterans—not from the government. What I have in mind is a communal ritual with religious force that recognizes that everyone who has shed blood, no matter how blamelessly, is in need of purification [...] The community as a whole, which sent these young people to train in the profession of arms and to use those arms, is no less in need of purification. Such rituals must be communal with the returning veterans, not something done to or for them before they return to civilian life.⁸³

Tick, Becknell, Hanifen, Shay and other scholars, veterans, and activists who address the social issue of war-related stress and PTSD, thus, propose specific ceremonies, and they envision and formulate corresponding attitudes, symbols, and codes of conduct. Yet, their ideas about reintegration and trauma do not merely prescribe and call for specific community behavior. Their texts and scripts on ceremonialism and community support have meta-ritualistic features because they perform sample ceremonies to teach their audiences how civil society should approach its returning veterans. By showcasing such behavior and values, they themselves are part of the current civic engagement efforts to nurture and maintain relationships between soldiers, veterans, and civil society, and thus confront reintegration and trauma from a social and communal perspective by way of a ritual script. Hence, these messages entail many of the aspects discussed in this chapter so far. If Native American (or ancient ‘Western’) military traditions of ceremonially resuming community relationships after war were to provide role models for US veteran reintegration, civilians can be expected to assume responsibility for sending soldiers to war and to communicate to returning veterans that their experience will be acknowledged and their (possibly traumatic) memories soothed, that they will not be left alone during readjustment, and that their experience will serve to further support the community in a mutual process of cultural as well as cognitive meaning-making.

81 Hanifen, “Three Gifts You Can Give Returning Veterans.”

82 Shay, *Odysseus*, 152.

83 Shay, 245.

However, any attempts at such transcultural role modeling run the risk of overlooking critical contextual differences. Recall that Holm distinguishes between the relationships of warriors and the social roles of soldiers. Because texts in military psychology and veterans' affairs frequently portray US soldiers as 'warriors,' their use of the term requires more detailed scrutiny at this point. It seems logical that, if many protagonists in the discourse on war experience and veterans subscribe to the notion of universality and to the archetype of the warrior hero, they also find striking similarities between US soldiers' and veterans' experience and that of tribal or even ancient mythical warriors and heroes. From this perspective, the term 'warrior' places a contemporary US veteran in a universal masculine tradition that is apparently as old as humanity. The veterans and soldiers thus depicted not only acquire a certain sense of 'coolness,' their connection to this tradition suggests that there must be time-honored and effective solutions to the problems associated with their ancient profession.

Yet, to many critical observers, the unqualified use of 'warrior' in the modern US military context signifies machismo and militarism as it seems to subscribe to the image of the savage: it links masculinity with ferocity and physical superiority. In this context, using the term with reference to non-Native soldiers and veterans once more reveals an ethnocentric understanding of tribal societies as 'primitive.' It perceives tribal warriors as overtly masculine savages whose gender role and social status is supposedly anchored in physical strength, virility, and violence. These notions resemble the alleged praise of 'positive' tribal features in some sports mascots featuring Native Americans—from this perspective, too, praise for 'warrior' traditions in US society can be interpreted as a veiled celebration and reinstatement of the national myth. It is the notion that Euro-American strength and cleverness overcame the fierce Indigenous warriors for the conquest of the West, and, by calling the soldiers (or athletes) 'warriors,' proponents might, in fact, appropriate the image of Indigenous ferocity to construct and uphold their own colonialist national myths.⁸⁴

These ethnocentric perspectives might also serve to oppose the use of 'warrior' for US soldiers and veterans. Consider the following US veteran's blog post: The author argues that the frequent reference to presumably primitive, tribal, and ancient societies (he includes the popular reference to Spartans and Romans here) diminishes the achievements, discipline, and professional skills of modern US soldiers.⁸⁵ Similarly, an article in *Military Review* explicitly distinguishes

84 See the discussion in Schmidt, "Indians in the Military," especially Holm's contribution on mascots.

85 pptsapper, "Stop Calling Us Warriors."

between ‘soldier’ and ‘warrior,’ constructing a hierarchy: “Historically, the name warrior has connoted an advocate of war, one not only skilled but also bloody-minded and primitive.”⁸⁶ The author depicts warriors as undisciplined and selfish, emphasizing that soldiers know their function and role in a state’s war machinery and do not succumb to blood lust in battle, whereby “[m]arketing a warrior mentality sends the wrong messages.”⁸⁷ Clearly, this perspective, in referring to historical mythology and literature about ancient wars, ascribes primitive traits to warrior culture and, thus, refuses to acknowledge the term ‘warrior’ as a useful concept for contemporary professional US soldiering.

However, activists with a penchant for Indigenous role models might propose a perspective that does not construct hierarchical primitive-civilized binary oppositions, but emphasizes the community relationships of warriors as critical attributes. Their thrust would argue that warriorhood and modern US soldiering should not be understood in such distinctive terms of community relationships versus social roles, as Holm has it. Their approach, bringing in cultural criticism once more, allows a US soldier to be seen as a ‘warrior’ within the social contract. In the ritualized and highly spiritual context where civil-military relationships are understood as a “sacred covenant,”⁸⁸ this ‘warrior’ would not so much appear as an anonymous functionary of the state, but as a community servant embedded in the spiritual fabric of that community.⁸⁹

This perspective becomes obvious in Tick’s use of the term which explicitly looks to Native American war-related traditions and philosophy when he traces the idea of the US ‘warrior’ back to the warrior archetype.⁹⁰ His explanation incorporates warriorhood as a set of community relationships, especially where he draws on a definition attributed to Sitting Bull: “Warriors are not what you think of as warriors. The warrior is not someone who fights, because no one has the right to take another life. The warrior is one who sacrifices himself for the good of others. His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, those

86 Fromm, “Warriors, the Army Ethos, and the Sacred Trust of Soldiers,” 20.

87 Fromm, 23. Cf. also the discussion about warrior imagery in Gomez, “The Ethics of the Marine Corps Urination Case.”

88 Scurfield, “Innovative Approaches,” 5; cf. Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 40; Zacchea, “Veteran’s Advocacy: Social Justice and Healing through Activism,” 37.

89 The degree of immediacy and interactivity in milblogs explored below will also quickly dissolve the notions of anonymity and reveal an atmosphere of familiarity among bloggers and their audience, albeit not in a formalized structure of (substitute) kinship relations as evident in Native American warrior traditions.

90 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 178–84.

who cannot provide for themselves, and above all, the children, the future of humanity.⁹¹ Tick emphasizes a devotion to causes that are greater than self-interest or personal relationships—once more, a perspective on transcending the individual⁹²—he highlights the warrior’s service to the community which entails “guiding, protecting, and passing on information and wisdom,” and he hints at how this wisdom is to be employed: “Having confronted death, a warrior knows how precious and fragile life is and does not abuse or profane it.”⁹³ He stresses that (Indigenous) warrior training and guidance include a highly personal sense of interrelationships with society; warriors are made aware that their own survival matters to community elders and that their experience is critical to cultural preservation.⁹⁴ Determining how modern US soldiering apparently abandoned this archetypal warrior function, he criticizes the loss of community interaction in US mainstream society, i.e., the soldiers’ guidance from and advice for elders. To him, today’s soldiers are not trained to be warriors but “to behave as part of a mass machine of destruction.”⁹⁵ This depiction reveals the challenges of discussing archetypes of the human psyche in the context of war—it necessarily ignores political aspects and the common practice of warfare which evoke numerous contradictory historical examples. Regardless of underlying political and social systems, the dehumanization of the enemy is often a standard procedure in warfare which breeds hatred and is frequently the cause for atrocities. It is in this context of dehumanization that public discourse frequently activates notions of soldiers as primitive savages who go on an avenging rampage against the enemy’s wickedness.⁹⁶ To argue that the military-industrial complex and aggressive foreign policy have turned US soldiers away from an ideal of clean warfare implies that there had once been an original state in which US soldiers did embody the (nurturing and ethical) warrior archetype. However, in the context of civil-military relationships, Tick’s argument resembles Holm’s notion that soldiers today primarily fulfill social roles, while warriors are tied to their communities in complex, reciprocal relationships, and it makes apparent the community-oriented thrust of Tick’s comparative approach.

In his latest book, Tick draws conclusions from this philosophy to propose reforms in US veterans’ affairs. He explains how tribal “medicine chiefs”

91 Qtd. in Tick, *Warrior’s Return*, 128.

92 Monnet, “War and National Renewal,” para. 5.

93 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 177.

94 Tick, 178–79.

95 Tick, 182.

96 Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 53; Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 243.

provide “warrior medicine” to combatants, that is, they serve as spiritual and moral counselors and guides.⁹⁷ He infers that US military chaplains should take on similar roles, providing “warrior medicine” for the “preparation, protection, and restoration of warrior’s souls,” to introduce soldiers to the notion of universality in war experience, and to the worldwide traditions of coming to terms with such experience. Basically, these chaplains would serve as ceremonial leaders in soldiers’ spiritual initiation processes.⁹⁸ Tick cites a chaplain who, before deploying to Afghanistan, had learned from and been blessed by Lakota spiritual elders: “This ritual helped me develop my own self-understanding and establish my role and identity as a warrior medicine chief, which was not nurtured or developed at seminary or the Army Chaplain School. Grounded in this identity, I provided restorative and transformational ministry to my soldiers throughout the deployment cycle.”⁹⁹ From his analogy of the subsequent and reciprocal circles of protection in Plains societies, Tick identifies warriorhood for US soldiers by invoking the social contract: “During threat, warriors encircle and protect the rest of us. When they return, it is our responsibility to encircle and protect and tend them. Instead, today, our wounded and veterans are shuffled out of view and their care left to experts or agencies that are understaffed and ill-equipped to respond,” concluding that, in establishing communal war-related practices modeled after those of tribal societies “[w]e would help heal not just our veterans but our entire society. Wandering and wounded warriors need a tribe waiting to receive and heal them. If we are that tribe, they will come home to us. Healing our veterans heals us all.”¹⁰⁰ His view on veteran reintegration, thus, harks back to Junger’s praise of the mutual aid and reciprocity in tribal societies. Clearly, envisioned through this lens, the idealized non-Native warrior would resemble a community servant in a reciprocal relationship more than a professional soldier who simply does his or her job.

Tick bemoans that US society does not provide its “legions of veterans” and “uninitiated men” with elders to offer them guidance.¹⁰¹ In this context, Becknell refers to psychologist Robert J. Lifton’s notion of the “socialized warrior” who, unlike the archetypal “hero warrior,” is trained to kill and avoid being killed, “but in the end his specific acts of killing and dying are not transcendent in a way that

97 Tick, *Warrior’s Return*, 177.

98 Tick, 189.

99 Qtd. in Tick, *Warrior’s Return*, 190. The text does not specify if this chaplain is Native or Euro-American.

100 Tick, “What Is a Warrior?”

101 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 184.

provides a new vision of existence; rather these acts are revered in themselves, and in the service of group aggrandizement.”¹⁰² In order to “create mature elders” and to reconnect the decision-making about, objectives of, and learning from war, Tick proposes that American society should restore the warrior archetype through “an amalgamation of traditional wisdom and practices coupled with the insights of modern depth psychology and the social sciences.”¹⁰³ Regardless of the political justification of a war, he argues, a society should be aware that, by sending soldiers out to do the killing on its behalf it must be held responsible and actively contribute to prepare soldiers before leaving and to reintegrate the veterans and help them live with the consequences of killing upon their return.

While the term ‘warrior’ in publications on veterans’ affairs often does not contextualize such cultural-philosophical considerations and simply denotes any person adept at and experienced in combat, others load it with religious connotations, albeit not related to tribal traditions.¹⁰⁴ Charles Moskos, musing about the repercussions of transforming the military from the draft system to an all-volunteer army in the 1970s, does not use the term ‘warrior’ but expresses concern that a mere understanding of soldiering as an “occupation” rather than a “calling” would make soldiers abandon notions of self-sacrifice and role dedication.¹⁰⁵ His concern derives from the philosophical tradition of the American citizen soldier who was bound to sacrifice himself for the republic as part of the social contract. The draft for the Civil War and some of the twentieth-century wars rested on the idea of sacrificing one’s individual liberties (and ultimately, one’s life) for the nation.¹⁰⁶ Anthony King interprets the American sense of modern warriorhood in a nation-specific religious context with an increasing global emphasis on soldierly professionalism. While the American “warrior ethos” emphasizes “preparedness,” manifest in physical, intellectual, as well as mental and emotional resilience which is shared by other national forces,¹⁰⁷ King

102 Qtd. in Becknell, “Listening to Narratives of War,” 48–49; Lifton, *Home from the War*, 29.

103 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 184.

104 See Hoge, *Once a Warrior*, xxii; Grossman and Christensen, *On Combat*, xix. In the official Soldier’s Creed of the US Army, the interchangeability of the terms is manifest in the first two lines: “I am an American Soldier. I am a warrior and a member of a team.” “Soldier’s Creed—Army Values.” This is also why proponents of a hierarchical distinction between the terms criticize its interchangeable use. Cf. Fromm, “Warriors.”

105 Moskos, “The All-Volunteer Military: Calling, Profession, or Occupation,” 2.

106 Cf. Monnet, “War and National Renewal”; Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-Culture*.

107 King, *The Combat Soldier*, 330.

detects an additional, uniquely American element that resembles Moskos's notion of the "calling":

[T]he professional US military is generally infused with a religiosity which is both unusual in comparison with its allies and provides officers with a shared culture. This religiosity is closely related to the US concept of duty, honour, and national mission to create a warrior ethos by which the American military as an institution understands itself. Many serving personnel actively see themselves not only as fulfilling their civic obligations but that those commitments are divinely inspired.¹⁰⁸

This apparent religiosity and sense of crusadership is a recurring motif in American military history, expressing a belief in the universality of US war objectives (e.g., the protection of democratic values) that was traditionally used to rally the nation behind the flag but also to justify a war internationally.¹⁰⁹ While these 'Western' notions of warriorhood usually do not define a 'warrior' in the Indigenous sense of mutual obligations for protection, service, and support in a close-knit kinship system, they invoke the concept of 'civil religion,' that is, a quasi-religious attitude toward national institutions that transcends the individual and engenders collective identity through individuals' (blood) sacrifice in the name of the group.¹¹⁰ In both proposing a sacrificial attitude and exerting this attitude as part of military culture, officers as described by King engage in the meta-ritualistic performance of values and knowledges that they deem as ideal in their cultural context.¹¹¹

108 King, 427.

109 Moon, *Confines of Concept*, 75; Snow and Drew, *From Lexington to Desert Storm and Beyond*, 11–13.

110 Cf. Brænder, *Justifying*; Monnet, "War and National Renewal"; Haberski, *God and War*; Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-Culture*. Civil religion is discussed at length in the next chapter to explore how milblogs can be understood as rituals of negotiating war experience. Regarding the concept of 'warrior,' but also of the social context of war experience and psychological injury in general, quite a few texts address spiritualism as an avenue for meaning-making. Cf. Dugal, "Affirming the Soldier's Spirit Through Intentional Dialogue"; Adsit, *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual*; Fr. Stephen, "A New Tribe, Babylon Diaries Reader."

111 See also Haldén and Jackson, *Transforming Warriors*, 2, for analyses of the "metaphysical aspects of war." This collection was published while the present study was being prepared for print and could thus not be analyzed in detail. However, its reference to Scandinavian warrior traditions (such as the berserker) employs a similar cultural-comparative approach as this study, and it suggests universal elements of war experience when it looks into traditions of ritualized transformation between civilians and 'warriors.'

Apart from these philosophical considerations of how Native American traditions and imagery influence civic activism in veterans' affairs, activist psychologists and psychotherapists have begun to incorporate elements of these traditions into conventional therapeutic practice for veterans. This development originates in part from a desire and from tribal demands to improve mental health care for the Native American population and from a realization that traditional Indigenous, culturally specific approaches to mental health might complement conventional medicine.¹¹² However, the studies on the effect of traditional therapies, along with an increased interest in the ethnography of these Indigenous practices among medical researchers, also served as springboards to investigate in how far such methods might serve non-Native populations and improve trauma therapy and veterans' mental health care in general. I introduce a few select approaches and proponents here to illustrate their pronounced interest in the psychological processes of meaning-making through narrative and community support, and to discuss how their activism impacts mental health care for veterans in general.

John P. Wilson and Steven M. Silver were among the early proponents of alternative therapies who took cues from Indigenous practices. In a 1988 essay, they argue that the relatively young field of mental health care had so far not considered spirituality as a serious factor because it was dependent on quantifiable, reliable, and repeatable results, which spirituality was considered too intangible to provide. However, they posit that spirituality should be considered a relevant criterion because of the psychological processes involved in ritual, and because of the holistic worldview prevalent among traditional societies—if a particular segment of the population believes that body, mind, and spirit are inseparably inter-related, mental health care for this group could not unveil the core of a person's emotional problems unless it also considered possible spiritual aspects.¹¹³ In addition, and especially regarding practices such as the sweat lodge ceremony,

112 In the wake of long-term studies on the psychological effects of war among various ethnic groups of Vietnam veterans in the 1980s and 1990s, the US Public Health Service proposed better, culturally sensitive care for the respective communities and client populations. Since then, clinical research has produced a significant number of studies on how traditional and conventional approaches can support one another to provide more balanced and client-centered care. Cf. United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service, "Mental Health"; Kramer et al., "Do Correlates of Dual Use"; Hobbs, "VA and IHS"; Gurley et al., "Comparative Use of Biomedical Services."

113 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 339–40.

the authors identify transcultural therapeutic dimensions that transcend specific cultural cosmology and could be employed for adapted PTSD treatments, of which the promotion of self-disclosure in a situation of close physical and emotional bonding is particularly significant for this study.¹¹⁴ They conclude:

[A]lthough it is undoubtedly the case that the ceremony is more powerful in terms of its symbolic and culturally specific meaning to Native Americans, it is our belief that it has a core psychological process that is universal in its effects. Although we do not wish to diminish the spiritual aspects of this ritual to Native Americans, it is believed that controlled scientific studies would demonstrate the efficacy of this ritual as a therapeutic tool for the treatment of PTSD.¹¹⁵

Since these early explorations, Wilson and his colleagues have argued that this “core psychological process” should enable a set of “cross-cultural rituals,”¹¹⁶ of which many revolve around cathartic disclosure and community building. Especially Wilson’s emphasis on narrative should be considered here:

Narrative, the story, the history of experience is the other key theme. Aboriginal people have a strong narrative tradition and their stories and healing are accepted intertwining processes. Narrative therapy has been seen as a valuable framework, by Aboriginal people in Australia and incorporated as a model for psychotherapy and counselling; narrative is a strong component of many ‘healing’ programmes dealing with the distress experienced by those of the ‘Stolen Generations’. Furthermore the ‘story’ of experience, of concerns, of feelings, of distress is the core of all clinical history taking and thus familiar to good clinicians.¹¹⁷

Since mental health professionals see the sharing of experience as the core of their diagnostic work, it is no coincidence that Wilson and others found the therapeutic work and the construction of group cohesion through public narrative in Indigenous ceremonies particularly appealing. Wilson points out repeatedly that societies throughout history have developed healing rituals tailored to their respective cultural contexts, and that research and therapy should identify these rituals’ cross-cultural elements to apply these elements in therapy within one’s own cultural contexts. He lists a number of purpose-oriented practices that might be designed as cross-cultural rituals, such as rituals of purification (e.g., sweat lodge ceremonies), recognition ceremonies to honor survivors (e.g.,

114 Silver and Wilson, 347.

115 Silver and Wilson, 351.

116 Wilson, “Culture-Specific Pathways to Healing and Transformation for War Veterans Suffering PTSD,” 48.

117 Wilson and Tang, *Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD*, 353.

Memorial Day), homecomings and reunions, or rituals of “unfinished business” to confront traumatized veterans with their memories and to reach closure.¹¹⁸

During the last several decades, psychologists and psychotherapists have developed a variety of such community-oriented therapeutic methods anchored around the notion of ritual and cathartic narrative. Many of them seek to define and integrate universal elements from culture-specific practices. They all emphasize the necessity to integrate friends and families into the therapeutic setup, they create formal settings and situations explicitly as ‘rituals,’ and they frequently rely on an exchange of sharing experience and bearing witness to generate moments of social absorption. One text reports on innovative PTSD therapy at a medical center, arguing that “[c]eremonies compartmentalize the review of the trauma, provide symbolic enactments of transformation of previously shattered relationships, and reestablish connections among family and with society in general [...] Ritual and ceremony are highly efficient vehicles for accessing and containing intense emotions evoked by traumatic experience.”¹¹⁹ This approach seeks to learn from Indigenous war-related ceremonies, to create ritualized, symbolic situations of homecoming (e.g., veterans meet their relatives during a hike), releasing of burdens (e.g., burning problems and memories symbolized by material items in a ceremonial fire), or transformation (e.g., veterans plant trees to signify rebirth and the beginning of a new phase in their lives).¹²⁰

However, it is critical to note that the authors are careful to maintain cultural distinctiveness in their application of cross-cultural elements and to consider the limits of spirituality in a therapeutic setting. They warn that other cultures’ rituals generally

do not match the cultural perspective of most Vietnam veterans. The effectiveness of these rituals is presumably at least partly determined by their embeddedness in the warrior’s culture, family, and friendship network [...] Using a ceremony, however elegant, out of context of the veteran’s family and society is questionable practice. The need for Vietnam veterans to return to and be fully integrated by American society requires ceremonies designed within a more secular context.¹²¹

The practitioners in this example emphasize the importance of cultural context for the success of therapy. While they, like Wilson, recognize the value of

118 Wilson, “Culture-Specific Pathways,” 48.

119 Johnson et al., “The Therapeutic Use of Ritual and Ceremony in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” 283.

120 Johnson et al., 283–84.

121 Johnson et al., 284.

war-related rituals for Native American warriors and communities, they are aware that therapy for non-Native veterans requires building a therapeutic setting with which the clients feel familiar. After all, they are supposed to ‘come home’ and to reintegrate into the ‘normalcy’ of their social civilian environments. Staying too close to the Indigenous origins of the rituals might make the therapy too exotic to be comfortable for some non-Native clients, hence the reference to a “more secular context.” This consideration, of course, is geared towards the non-Native veteran clients’ cultural perspective and does not address the issue of cultural appropriation that would immediately emerge as a concern if the Native American perspective of such a cross-cultural transfer was regarded. The final chapter returns to this issue in more detail as it explores a homecoming scenario for an ethnically mixed group of veterans in which Native American ritual elements are taken out of context and used by the non-Native ceremonial leader, creating a crisis for the Native veterans in the group but also seemingly making some non-Native veterans uncomfortable with the unfamiliar cultural context of the setting.

Psychological research and therapeutic practice, however, frequently address the issue of appropriation in cross-cultural therapy. Indigenous scholar Lawrence Gross proposes ecumenical memorial services and communal rituals, urging Native American religious leaders and scholars to help non-Native civil society and caregivers develop war-related rituals based on the Indigenous model, yet geared toward the cultural expectations and contexts of non-Native mainstream society.¹²² Gerald Mohatt shares conclusions from his own medical practice working with traditional healers in stating that cultural appropriation occurs as soon as non-Native actors employ Indigenous knowledge and materials “for their own ends.”¹²³ He adds that: “to get beyond the level of appropriation, we had to become part of an exchange process and become peers in sharing, to become learners and teachers.”¹²⁴ In this spirit of mutual learning, a number of publications and academic networks have recently begun to integrate Indigenous knowledge and epistemology into psychology and therapeutic practice. The cross-cultural virtues of practices such as the sweat lodge ceremony

122 Gross, “Assisting,” 384–85, 401; Gross, “Native American.” Note also how carefully Gross emphasizes the gaps in his own initiation to Anishinaabe ceremonial practices, how they restrict his capability to conduct tribal healing ceremonies and guide his work toward developing ceremonies for non-Native veterans in a respectful manner. Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways*, 1.

123 Mohatt and Eagle Elk, *The Price of a Gift*, 186.

124 Mohatt and Eagle Elk, 186.

feature prominently once more.¹²⁵ In addition, the protagonists are concerned with the interaction between traditional and conventional medicine (to benefit both Indigenous and non-Native populations) as well as with ethical issues.¹²⁶ To provide another example of cross-cultural therapy for veterans initiated by Native protagonists, the Yakama nation of Washington State established a healing camp for Indigenous veterans in the 1990s. The project has explicitly invited Veterans Administration and non-Native medical personnel to raise awareness for culturally specific problems among Native veterans in the VA system, but, because interest in the project grew over the years, it has also included healing retreats for both Indigenous and non-Native veterans, based on the experience of and conducted by Indigenous traditional healers.¹²⁷

As these above observations and examples have illustrated, public discourse on war experience and trauma since Vietnam in US society was accompanied by an increasing interest in psychology and veterans affairs. It caused both the field of psychology and civic activists in veterans affairs to venture into disciplines such as cultural anthropology and religion to expand their perspectives on veteran reintegration and trauma and to include social and community-centered approaches in their agendas, models, and activities. The realization that Native American cultures have developed efficient traditions of veteran reintegration not only helped health care providers include traditional medicine to improve care for Indigenous communities. Scholars in psychology and Native American studies, but also civic activists from both ethnic groups have come forward to promote community-oriented ceremonies and therapies for non-Native veterans, to benefit from Indigenous experience. However, this phenomenon is also interrelated with another, parallel development: Psychology and the field of veteran studies have increasingly become invested with the notions of the narrative. The following subchapter thus complements the discussion on the social aspects of war experience and therapy by exploring how psychology and psychiatry have incorporated narrative into their work and, thus, how notions of sharing experience and storytelling have gained ground in the field.

125 Smith, "The Sweat Lodge as Psychotherapy. Congruence between Traditional and Modern Healing."

126 Moodley and West, *Integrating Traditional Healing Practices Into Counseling and Psychotherapy*; Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, "Indigenizing Psychology Symposium. Indigenous Education Network (IEN)."

127 Flores, *Camp Chaparral Native Americans Show VA Caregivers How to Deal with PTSD*; "Camp Chaparral Welcome Home."

Narrative in Psychology and Mental Health Care

People tell stories and share their experience with other people. Listening, acknowledging, and responding to these narratives sets in motion processes of meaning-making among the participants; their communication through and about narrative transmits and negotiates knowledge, values and norms, that is, it conducts cultural work and constructs identity. Yet narrative has not become a relevant focus of interest in psychology for its communal and cultural properties alone. The mere act of formulating one's experience into a narrative already helps an individual to process and order his or her memories. Psychology has, thus, sought to employ both the communal and the cognitive aspects of narrative for its work. At the start of treatment, therapists seek to identify the nature and roots of a client's emotional distress through verbalization; many therapeutic approaches rely on extensive communication between therapist and client that aim toward meaning-making. During the 1990s, the role of narrative in expressing and learning to negotiate memories and the corresponding emotions became a significant research interest in the field. This is in part owing to the 'Narrative Turn' that, since the 1970s, has impacted and reshaped epistemological paradigms not only in literary theory, but also in cultural studies, history, the social sciences and, increasingly, psychology and psychiatry. Psychologists interested in "posttraumatic growth" argue that a structuralist and formalist perspective on narratives in psychology might prove the link between social support and recovery from trauma.¹²⁸ In addition, the understanding in postclassical narratology that narratives are vehicles for world-making serves psychologists to help clients contextualize emotional memories with their identity and their social environments.¹²⁹

The following subsection argues that the influence of narrative on psychology helps understand how notions of ceremonial storytelling permeate the discourse of war experience because psychology and its recent approaches

128 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 90; cf. Neimeyer, "Re-Storying Loss. Fostering Growth in the Post-Traumatic Narrative." As Bradley Lewis has it in his proposal to open his field further to narratological questions and methodologies, the "narrative ferment" serves not only to reorient and reevaluate psychiatry itself, but also vis-a-vis other disciplines in academia as it offers a "deeper reflection about the way psychiatry makes meaning and constructs its models." Lewis, "Taking a Narrative Turn in Psychiatry," 23.

129 Alber and Fludernik, "Introduction," 5–6; Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 9; Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals," 61; cf. Bruner, "Self-Making and World-Making."

and perspectives feature so prominently in the discourse. I will address a few select aspects of the influence of narrative on psychology and psychiatry for two reasons: First, they further elucidate interrelations with arguments in promoting social perspectives on war experience, such as the popularity of the community-oriented Indigenous ceremonies described above, particularly where approaches seek to integrate rituality into the therapeutic process. Second, psychological research has produced a number of studies on how talking or writing about emotional distress enhances an individual's cognitive processing of such distressing memories. These works and their therapeutic solutions illustrate the awareness about these concepts in the public, and they further explain how notions of the therapeutic influence the cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios. That is, they serve to explore how the analytic lens of Indigenous war-related ceremonies reveals that many participants understand these cultural practices as informal and implicitly social-therapeutic settings, which underscores their cultural and social functions.

Their recent focus on narrative affects mental health research and therapy in its broad applications. Frequently, studies interested in constructions of meaning through disclosure in therapy combine their research thrust with considerations about ritual, that is, they assume a sense and the active participation of community to share in the meaning-making process and to help clients (re)construct their selves in relation to a particular group identity and relationships with their group.¹³⁰ Research and therapeutic approaches integrate narrative and mental health care in the field of ritual theater and creative therapy,¹³¹ in palliative care¹³² and, of course, in veterans' mental health care. Because narrative exploration is so tied to meaning constructions, it is no surprise that civic activism in veterans' affairs is also keen on the issue and eager to integrate scholarship from various fields for social work.

Conventional and widely applied therapies for trauma and PTSD already involve narrative elements. Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment (CBT) and variants of exposure therapy all require the verbalization, sequencing, and contextualization of memories and emotions via extended communication between therapists and clients, and they aim to construct a coherent 'narrative' integrating the

130 The notion of meaning-making through ritual recurs in the detailed readings of milblogs in the following chapter.

131 Cf. Schrader, *Ritual Theatre*. The final chapter on homecoming scenarios will return to theater when it explores social activists' projects of veteran reintegration.

132 Cf. Romanoff and Thompson, "Meaning Construction in Palliative Care."

clients' memories into their selves.¹³³ However, these conventional methods face criticism in the context of war trauma treatment: They are bound to the definitions and diagnostic parameters in the various editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)*, which are still being controversially debated. Some scholars argue that these definitions and parameters are too vague to grasp and pinpoint all aspects of war-related stress and trauma. In addition, statistics suggest that these treatments are not available to, nor useful for all veterans, and only about half of the conventional treatment programs begun by US veterans are both completed *and* deemed successful.¹³⁴ In contrast, alternative approaches frequently face resistance among scholars because they are not determined by *DSM* procedures and guided by *DSM* diagnostic protocols, and because treatment has not yet produced much reliable empirical clinical data; their claims to success have in large part been based on positive feedback from clients and their relatives, with empirical results to be expected only in the coming years.¹³⁵ Still, the recent dissemination of studies about alternative and community-oriented treatments to war stress and trauma suggests a much greater interest in them in the public and reflects their popularity among clients and their relatives.

Charles Hoge served as a therapist but also administered mental health care programs for veterans of the post-9/11 wars. In his self-help book for veterans, he outlines conventional trauma therapies but also promotes alternative and easy-to-use stress regulation methods (e.g., meditation) to support veterans' readjustment processes upon return from deployment. He dedicates an entire chapter to the role of memory negotiation through narrative. While he lists prominent reasons why veterans tend to be wary of disclosure (e.g., apprehension that civilians will not comprehend or be appalled by their experience, or anxiety about triggering uncontrollable emotions¹³⁶) he refers to the notion of universal

133 Among others, narratology discusses the situatedness, sequentiality, experientiality, perspectivalization, self-reflexivity, and the embedding of cultural values and norms as relevant attributes of narratives for (social) psychology. Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 8–14.

134 Scurfield, "Innovative Approaches," 1–2.

135 Scurfield, 2–4.

136 The military culture of hypermasculinity, of enduring adversity and hardship without complaint, also contributes to this wariness. Admitting emotional distress, to many soldiers and veterans, would damage a well-honed image, be it that of the imper-turbable masculine 'warrior' or of the resilient professional soldier. This culture of silence is also reflected in milblogger Colby Buzzell's comments: He feared his fellow soldiers might suspect he was gay if they learned that he kept a diary. Buzzell, *My War*, 124, 138.

warrior traditions in stating that telling war stories has always been a central part of veterans' rituals and that "narration is essential for making a successful transition home."¹³⁷ Narrating experiences, Hoge emphasizes, connects emotions to particular events, and, when narrators learn about similar (even if not war-related) experiences from their audience in response, they realize that they are not alone and that others share and can relate to their emotions. Most important, however, is the way narrating for an audience helps negotiate emotions:

In order to even acknowledge our deepest feelings, we need to know that there is someone who cares and who's willing to listen without judgment as we struggle to express ourselves. This is the power of narration, and the reason why ministers, rabbis, and therapists will always be able to make a living. There is something very healing in being able to put our experiences, thoughts, emotions, and feelings into words.¹³⁸

It is striking that Hoge invokes religious leaders and therapists in the same breath. Some proponents of narrative therapy argue along similar lines as they explore the psychological mechanics of therapeutic disclosure: "Translating important psychological events into words is uniquely human. Therapists and religious leaders have known this intuitively for generations."¹³⁹ This perspective, thus, integrates meaning-making and the construction of identity with community relationships, spirituality, and mental health. Individual war experience, to these proponents, ultimately carries social significance, and making sense of it requires social responses and group efforts. The interpretation of this meaning—for the bearer of war experience as much as for his or her social environment—cannot be restricted to therapists alone. Again, meaning-making (and healing) are portrayed as social, communal responsibilities.

Among the alternative pathways to war experience and trauma extending beyond cognitive and neurological perspectives, social approaches seek to include peer bonding among veterans and support from their families and communities. One of the most prominent proponents of such approaches is Jonathan Shay. He argues that "recovery happens only in community" and that the one-on-one interaction between client and therapist does not constitute a community, yet.¹⁴⁰ Communal healing requires members of the veterans' social environment to bear witness to their narration and to express acknowledgment and support. Unsurprisingly, a recent anthology of essays on alternative approaches to war

137 Hoge, *Once a Warrior*, 116.

138 Hoge, 117.

139 Pennebaker, "Writing About Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process," 165.

140 Shay, *Odysseus*, 4.

trauma presents various related community-oriented and narrative-driven therapies and projects and frequently refers to proponents of (ceremonial) narratives such as Jonathan Shay, Edward Tick, or Ron Capps.¹⁴¹

Psychology has borrowed from narratological literary studies as much as literary and cultural studies have profited from traumatology in recent decades. Jonathan Shay pioneered this expansion of interest within the mental health care professions by relating aspects of war trauma that he encountered in his therapeutic practice to ancient Greek literature, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, since the late 1980s.¹⁴² In a similar vein, British psychologist Nigel C. Hunt addresses war narratives in his exploratory book *Memory, War, and Trauma*. He argues that, since people construct memory influenced by the social and cultural contexts of events that they experience, these social and cultural contexts should rate as influencing criteria in trauma studies, as well: "No matter what the Zeitgeist says [...] in the end we depend on culture and we depend on each other. These are essential to psychological health. This is why social support consistently comes out as being the most important factor concerning how people deal with stress and difficulties in their lives."¹⁴³ He adds that narratives convey these contexts. Consequently, "[i]f we are to understand the nature of war, and the impact it has on people, then we must examine other approaches through, for example, literature, history, and the media."¹⁴⁴ His main argument for an interdisciplinary perspective on (traumatic) war experience and memory is that, while the focus on narrative reveals self and identity construction within an individual's social and cultural context, psychology contributes empirical data on "fundamental underlying universals regarding memory, the stress and fear response and other variables which also determine the response to traumatic experiences such as war."¹⁴⁵ He refers to a model developed by his team which

141 Scurfield and Platoni, *Healing War Trauma*. The phenomenon is also evident in the prevalence of veteran writing programs at universities, e.g., "Fallout. In the Aftermath of War"; "Collateral"; "Military Experience and the Arts," and programs organized by social workers and civic activists. Many invoke the Indigenous practice of ceremonial storytelling or the universal hero archetype in their reference to the warrior ethos, e.g., Morie, Haynes, and Chance, "Warriors' Journey"; "Warrior Writers."

142 Shay, "Trials." The final chapter details his work and discusses his influence on psychology and civic activism, especially regarding Greek tragedy with samples of modern, therapeutic theater projects.

143 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 3.

144 Hunt, 3.

145 Hunt, 6.

analyzes semi-structured interviews with veterans for narrative content (about the role of social support for reintegration and healing) and form (e.g., subjective truths, interpretations, emotions, integration, purpose, meaning).¹⁴⁶

Hunt seeks to benefit from hermeneutic and structuralist traditions of analyzing (war) narratives and their cultural and social contexts, but his approach seems to struggle with the constraints of interdisciplinary research. Having to rely on quantifiable data, his project resorts to content analysis, opening itself up to criticism from the humanities and social sciences. His work does not fully realize the potential of narratology—and postclassical narratology would open up more avenues for interdisciplinary work as they extend beyond structuralist and formalist perspectives and take in social and cultural contexts that would be relevant for war-trauma therapy. In addition, his approach is criticized for ignoring methods that would boost his interest in the social and cultural construction of memory, such as ethnography and oral history.¹⁴⁷ Other critics bemoan his method's neglect of stringent empiricism.¹⁴⁸ These apparently contradictory critiques illustrate the conundrum of interdisciplinary research in general, and of alternative therapies to war trauma in particular. In embracing the strengths of approaches beyond his disciplinary home turf, Hunt runs the risk of watering down his own strengths as much as failing to fully operationalize the ones that he introduces to his discipline (or safeguarding against their weaknesses). Generally, however, Hunt's study shows the productivity of interfacing psychology with narratology.

The following observations on the emerging field of narrative therapy similarly interface these perspectives and add to the previous discussion of social and community-oriented approaches in military psychology and veterans' affairs. It has been established that narratives in mental health care require an active and responsive audience, but the mere construction of narratives based on critical experience such as war already helps order and integrate memories. This is especially significant for a perspective on milblogs. Their cultural work emerges through the interaction between authors and audience, but, as the readings in the following chapters illustrate, authors and audience also recognize a therapeutic potential in their practice largely deriving from the authors' ability to put

146 Hunt, 128–29. See also Burnell, Hunt, and Coleman, “Using”; Burnell, Hunt, and Coleman, “Developing,” for a detailed overview of their interviews and narrative analysis.

147 Jessee, review of *Memory, War, and Trauma*.

148 Ashbaugh and Brunet, review of *Memory, War, and Trauma*.

their memories into words, to release them in the various public forums of new and social media, and to initiate conversation about these memories. This does not mean that milbloggers are traumatized or that they all intentionally blog to process troubling emotions. The observations on narrative therapy and narrative in psychology discussed here simply contextualize the process of ordering memories and experience in narrative construction, both for individual writers and for the joint, communal narrative construction in forums and blog comments. As the chapters below reveal, bloggers frequently experience this process as therapeutic and as a boost for their general mental well-being during deployment, regardless of their motivations to write. This attention to the therapeutic, then, should also be contextualized with the growing emphasis on narrative therapy in the discourse on war experience as it further helps explain the appeal of ceremonial storytelling.

Proponents of narrative therapy explore the role of narrative for meaning-making in emotionally distressing situations. They discuss two major theories about this role: first, that an individual's inability to disclose memories of critical events inhibits psychological functioning and mental well-being and, second, that "writing helps people reorganize thoughts and feelings"¹⁴⁹ about these events, eventually giving them a greater sense of control over their memories, making experience manageable, and "facilitat[ing] a sense of resolution" that allows troubling memories to be forgotten.¹⁵⁰ In a series of studies in which subjects were asked to write about emotional experience, narrative-therapy researchers confirmed this effect of story construction on memory.¹⁵¹ They discuss the mechanics of writing benefits by emphasizing elements of narrative construction such as the sequencing of events and their logical arrangement of causes and effects, as well as contextualizing the corresponding emotions.¹⁵² Such structural

149 Graybeal, Sexton, and Pennebaker, "The Role of Story-Making in Disclosure Writing," 571–72.

150 Pennebaker and Seagal, "Forming a Story," 1243. In the same vein, Great Plains warrior traditions hold that combat veterans can only truly 'come home' when they learn to 'forget' (i.e., leave behind) the war, achieved by talking about their memories in communal ceremonies. O'Neill, "Coming Home," 446.

151 Pennebaker and Seagal, "Forming a Story," 1243–45. However, the authors also caution that in many of their subjects who suffered from a form of PTSD, writing about traumatic memory triggered symptoms. Consequently, they suggest to use therapeutic writing only under guidance and by training additional coping skills. Pennebaker and Seagal, 1245.

152 Pennebaker and Seagal, 1248.

elements enhance the coherence of the narrative, allow the memory of the event to be organized, and reduce compulsive mulling over the same experience:

The beauty of a narrative is that it allows us to tie all of the changes in our life into a broad comprehensive story. That is, in the same story we can talk both about the cause of the event and its many implications. Much as in any story there can be overarching themes, plots, and subplots—many of them arranged logically and/or hierarchically. Through this process, the many facets of the presumed single event are organized into a more coherent whole.¹⁵³

The authors add that the contextualization and structuring, in the end, simplify the memories of the event and prepare the individual to gradually forget its horrifying aspects. Unsurprisingly, they conclude from their writing experiments that mental health clients should be encouraged to keep diaries to complement therapeutic practice.¹⁵⁴

Narrative therapy has recently begun to propose structured therapy methods including diary writing, but increasingly also harnessed the technological opportunities of new and social media. A collection of essays published in 2010 introduces such approaches to new technologies in mental health.¹⁵⁵ One of its contributions discusses websites, blogs, and wikis as “psychoeducation” tools to prepare clients for treatment and thus decrease time and effort in discussing basics during therapeutic sessions, but it also explicates how blogging might produce similar self-therapeutic effects as did the writing experiments by Pennebaker and others discussed above.¹⁵⁶ The author points out that “since most blogs allow others to comment on each entry, readers can provide beneficial (or harmful¹⁵⁷) feedback to the author about what they’ve written [...] This continuous feedback loop provides another level of potentially therapeutic work outside the therapy session.”¹⁵⁸ Note the author’s interest in the audience’s ability to respond to the narrative and to engage in social therapy through a joint construction of meaning.¹⁵⁹

153 Pennebaker and Seagal, 1250.

154 Pennebaker and Seagal, 1251.

155 Anthony, Nagel, and Goss, *Use of Technology*. See also Bolton et al., *Writing Cures*, for studies on writing techniques and methods in mental health care.

156 Grohol, “Using Websites, Blogs, and Wikis Within Mental Health,” 68–71.

157 Grohol, 71. This author, as well, is aware of the general risk of triggering trauma patients in uncontrolled therapeutic writing situations and considers precautions to establish control.

158 Grohol, 71.

159 See Nagel and Palumbo, “The Role of Blogging in Mental Health,” for an overview of how therapists manage their client base through blogs, on dangers of blogging in

Along these lines, one article promotes online forums for client peer support as a continuation of traditional self-help groups since the 1930s.¹⁶⁰ As in all forms of group therapy, the forums and chat rooms share knowledge, provide guidance, and encourage mutual aid.¹⁶¹ Yet their particular textuality adds other benefits that might support disinhibition and disclosure where face-to-face group therapy would run into obstacles: They offer anonymity and privacy, they do not require synchronous participation, they allow browsing among and engagement with archived discussion threads at leisure, they enable external links to further information, they are relatively inexpensive and easy to use, and—speaking of the broad genre of online forums—they have become an incremental part of social media culture and are thus a familiar medium to many users.¹⁶² The authors relate to other protagonists in the field, such as James Pennebaker, to emphasize the process of ordering thoughts through writing:

In addition to mere ventilation, the writer is focused on herself or himself while writing, allowing for an examination and re-examination of thoughts, for clarification, explanation and eventually—unlike in face-to-face interactions—the choice of whether to transmit the text to the group. This reflective process contributes to self-awareness, awareness of others and a developing sense of control [...] all in a safer place than the participants' offline environment.¹⁶³

These technological capabilities and functions enable a range of psychological effects. They decrease anxiety, offer a sense of empowerment, and support both giving and accepting advice and building relationships.¹⁶⁴ Jonathan Shay made similar observations regarding online self-help groups among Vietnam veterans, adding to the above lists that the asynchronous participation reduces self-confident and articulate members' tendencies to dominate discussions, allowing everybody to raise any issue at any time.¹⁶⁵ The professionals who describe these types

the mental health care environment (e.g., privacy issues, trigger situations), but also on benefits of mutual support from the audience in critical life situations, such as in the subgenre of cancer blogs. See Tan, "Psychotherapy 2.0: MySpace® Blogging as Self-Therapy," for a tentative discussion of self-therapeutic blogging in social media networks.

160 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, "Using Forums to Enhance Client Peer Support."

161 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 50.

162 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 47–50.

163 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 50.

164 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 50.

165 Shay, *Odysseus*, 200. He, too, warns against uncontrolled forums for explicitly therapeutic settings, suggesting that therapists or confidantes should monitor such forums

of forums and writing projects, while pointing out some risks, wholeheartedly endorse the settings, both for the social support they contribute to psychological treatment and because the cognitive processes attributed to writing involve psychological work that bolsters the respective treatments. Narrative therapy, thus, contributes valuable concepts and ideas to the overall discourse on war experience and informs its activist thrust at crisis solution through ceremonial storytelling.

Conclusion

These examples of psychological scholarship on war experience, ritual, and narrative discuss more or less explicit therapeutic settings, designed for and by those affected by emotional distress due to the critical life events that they experienced. In many cases, they are activist voices in the overall discourse on war experience. Their specialist professional backgrounds feed academic concepts and theories, cross-cultural and historical knowledge, general ideas, and practical crisis solutions into the discourse. I propose to use these activist voices for a better understanding of the cultural work of firsthand post-9/11 war narratives. This is not to suggest that war veterans per se are psychologically inhibited or traumatized and, thus, that war experience as such is pathological. However, it is a critical life event exerting significant stress and affecting veterans' personalities and sense of self, and veterans produce their narratives in a cultural environment that is sensitized to these affects. Their narratives are part of the overall, crisis-centered discourse phenomenon. In this context, it is critical to note that activist cultural comparison keenly observes how Native American cultures have negotiated war experience and how they designed elaborate welcoming, cleansing and healing ceremonies to address war's psychological impact when reintegrating their veterans into their communities, and to reconstitute these communities in pointing out the significance of the warriors' experience for the social fabric. Non-Native social and academic activists seek to embed their observations of Indigenous cultural practices in scientific studies on war-related psychology to develop veteran reintegration programs and therapies, but also explicit civic ceremonies, to achieve similar social and therapeutic effects in US mainstream society. Their proposals and activities transpose Indigenous traditions, and look for universal elements within these traditions, by comparing how discursive war-related practices serve to restore social equilibrium in their respective cultural contexts.

for destructive behavior that puts the well-being of other group members in jeopardy, and for signs of suicidal thoughts among members. Shay, 201.

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These observations on activist discourse, especially its cultural-comparative thrust, can be made productive for our understanding of the cultural work of ceremonial storytelling in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. Serving as a lens to scrutinize non-Native cultural practice, Indigenous war-related rituals operationalize functional equivalences in these otherwise disparate cultural contexts. They focus attention on the discursive context of negotiating war experience, while the concept of rituality reveals the cultural work and civic activism in these practices, that is, the way in which they constitute community and construct group identity. These observations on cultural criticism and on the construction of Indigenous role models for non-Native civic and academic activism illustrate the protagonists' sense of crisis regarding veteran reintegration. They manifest the widespread acknowledgment of the social and communal dimensions of war trauma in scholarship and public debate. They help explain the civic-engagement thrust and emotional commitment to relationship-building behind many of the audience responses in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. The fascination with narrative in psychology further highlights this popularity of social and community-oriented approaches in mental health care and civil society as it centers on meaning-making by negotiating experience.

In addition, contextualizing milblogs with the cultural comparisons and with the focus on the therapeutic in activist discourse allows us to draw further conclusions about their cultural work. Although most authors and many readers of a blog do not explicitly intend or expect their conversation to be therapeutic, the following chapters demonstrate that many are aware of and frequently discuss the therapeutic potential and effects inherent in their joint narratives, e.g., when bloggers comment on how the interaction with their audience helps reduce stress and assuage anxiety about being abandoned by society.¹⁶⁶ Even when a discussion of such therapeutic effects is lacking in the blogs, the lens of narrative and performative practices in Indigenous ceremonies sheds light on the blogs' cultural work and social-therapeutic function imminent in their communal and ceremonial negotiation of war experience and of the social contract. In short, the cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios primarily becomes manifest because this study's comparison with Indigenous war-related ceremonies reveals the complex cultural, social, and psychological functions inherent in their ceremonial storytelling practices.

166 See Traversa, "From Cats," for a milblogger's reflection on how important audience support became for his well-being and connections to civilian society back home. In the homecoming scenarios discussed in the final chapter, social-therapeutic intent becomes even more obvious.

