Responding to war: peace activism, WWI literature, and remembrance

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary thesis is based on six months of multi-sited fieldwork with the Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades' Association (MGC/OCA) in the UK and Voices for Creative NonViolence (VCNV) in the UK and the US, and remote follow-up interviews (due to COVID-19 restrictions), as well as the analysis of a primary corpus of WWI literary texts (*Under Fire: The Story of a Squad* (1916) by Henri Barbusse; *Undertones of War* (1928) by Edmund Blunden; *All Quiet on The Western Front* (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque; *Storm of Steel* (1920) by Ernst Jünger; and *Testament of Youth* (1933) by Vera Brittain. Straddling the disciplines of Modern Languages and Social Anthropology this thesis proposes an interdisciplinary methodology through applying 'abductive ethnography' across both disciplines (Bacj 2012), drawing out the points of convergence at the same time as accounting for their specificities. Interacting with my interlocutors and my corpus of WWI texts through what Kermode (1988) calls the commentary on these canonical works, this thesis begins with 'endings' as a way of articulating different stories. Critically engaging with my own 'multi-situated' positionality (Sunder Rajan 2021), I allow the fieldwork to influence the literary analysis and my engagement with the texts to inform my fieldwork. The various narratives addressed in this thesis are brought together to explore and question what moves people to engage with war through remembrance and activism, and how these practices take shape. Drawing on various theoretical approaches, this uncovers the ways in which this research shows both remembrance and peace activism as engaging with the dead but nonetheless geared towards the future. I ultimately propose a notion of multi-sensorial (re)reading which leads to interpretation and action.

Acknowledgements

Last and far from least: Maman, Papa, and Vita. I love you; I've missed you and thank you for always being there. Special mention goes to my mother Farida who always believed I could do and succeed at anything, and for showing me you can go to university whenever you want, not for the degree but for all it brings.

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Publications

The interview with Kathy Kelly which is referenced in Chapter III has been published under the title 'Literary Courage as a Roadmap to Activism: A Conversation with Kathy Kelly' in *FRAME: Journal of Literary Studies*, 2021, 34(1), pp. 73-87.

List of Terms

WWI	-	World War I
WWII	-	World War II
POW	-	Prisoner(s) of War
VAD	-	Voluntary Aid Detachment
CWGC	-	Commonwealth War Graves Commission
SEW	-	*Studiecentrum Eerste Wereldoorlog* ('Study Centre World War I')
DSEI	-	Defence and Security Equipment International
VCNV	-	Voices for Creative NonViolence
MGC/OCA	-	Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades' Association
MGC	-	Machine Gun Corps
OCA	-	Old Comrades' Association
VFP	-	Veterans for Peace
VITW	-	Voices in The Wilderness
APV	-	Afghan Peace Volunteers
WAT	-	Witness Against Torture
All Quiet	-	*All Quiet on The Western Front*
Under Fire	-	*Under Fire: The Story of a Squad*
Testament	-	*Testament of Youth*
Undertones	-	*Undertones of War*
Im Westen	-	*Im Westen nichts Neues*
Le Feu	-	*Le Feu: journal d'une escouade*
Memory of War	-	*The Thought of Death and the Memory of War*

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Introduction(s): 'Are you a spy?'

'Are you a spy? I mean…' He gestures with his hands. 'Just making sure you're not a spy'. It sounds only half like a joke. Especially after he gives me a sidelong glance and says he's just making sure, and that he will believe me if I say I'm not. It is the first time, but will not be the last, that one of the peace activists in the field asks me if I am a spy.

Buddy, an activist visiting from the US, and myself, here for research purposes, had arrived at the deconsecrated church where the activists took residence in the late afternoon. Rooms and beds were for people who were living there permanently, and we were offered a place to sleep in the chapel and in the old office where books were stacked from floor to ceiling. Neither of us was a familiar face there, even though Buddy is a peace activist too, and the peace group we were visiting had been informed that I was a PhD researcher. 'Researcher' would have been a decent cover if I wanted to shadow people and note down the activists' every move for nefarious purposes, and we are all aware of it.

I am curious, but hesitant about showing it—even before I am asked if I am a spy. Buddy and I are strangers in this group. Most of these people have been arrested numerous times. We go through to the chapel where a few people are running through the planned 'actions' for the next day. The predella is mostly empty, save for a couple of chairs, and the rows of benches have bags of supplies in at the far ends. Towards the front the run-through is going on and someone is covering what looks like a small coffin in black paint. Before we are shown into the space, which will be where we sleep, the question is asked.

'Are you a spy?'

Before the protest the next day I am asked the same question. After we arrive at the protest site, it quickly becomes clear why they were so careful around me. They are joining 'Stop the Arms Fair', protesting Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI; pronounced '*dicey*'), one of the largest arms fairs in the world. The fair is a biannual event in London and the activists have brought props which, if they are searched on the tube, will be confiscated.

This particular group of activists are Catholic Workers (CW),[1] and they intend to 'lock on' in the road during the protest, and if their props are taken away from them beforehand this will be made impossible. As I am not a spy, and no-one stops and searches us, we arrive with all the props safely in bags. Someone else, who wanted to hold a symbolic funeral on the road the protestors are blocking *has* been stopped and the small casket I had seen him work on the night before has been confiscated. He had been taken to the bureau and arrives at the site with empty hands. After our arrival, I take a walk around the terrain and within that hour everyone I have arrived with gets arrested.

Locking on, as it turns out, means to attach one's arms to the inside of a tube that has been reinforced with metal and concrete. The protestors I was with were lying in the road in twos, each with an arm in a tube, and the police had to halt any traffic coming through until they were freed. It is a straightforward but temporary method of stopping trucks with military materials and equipment driving up to the fairground. The idea is that the police will need to remove you without breaking or amputating your limbs, and so every hour they spend trying to free you, is an hour you are stopping the deliveries. The impermanence of the solution is not addressed. Nor is the question *if* the police cares about not harming you. When I hear about locking on, and when I see it later that day, I can feel that there are a series of unspoken assumptions underlying this practice. You must know your government well to do that. You must trust the police for that. Or rather, you must know that although the police might 'rough you up,' as my interlocutors put it, they value your life enough to not break your bones. Or you know or assume they dread the bad press and public outrage enough to not break your bones because of how your body and your life are valued, even when it is chained to something. That day this was especially clear because we were facing the MET police, which I was aware has been accused of racial profiling and using excessive force in such cases. Practices such as 'locking on' and to generally be with a group which voices its opinions loudly, in the street, at risk of arrest, while being aware I was one of the few people of colour among the protestors, made for an experience which was

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[1] The CW was founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933 in the US. Despite the name, they are not official organs of the Catholic Church. They identify as non-hierarchal Christian anarchists and pacifists. There is no priest for mass or confession; mass happens communally. Nonviolence and hospitality are at the core of the movement and of the CW House in London where they hosted Buddy and I during the DSEI protests.

entirely new to me, and which pushed at—and spilled well over the edges—of my comfort zone.

Interdisciplinarity as Methodology

This interdisciplinary thesis is part of a joint degree in Modern Languages and Social Anthropology. Embarking on a joint degree like this involved a steep learning curve—both where it concerned Social Anthropology, where the discipline and research methods were new to me, and in the experiment that was to become the synthesis of the two disciplines. Not to mention the fact that fieldwork was a new and rather mysterious event before embarking on it. In this thesis, neither discipline is intended to weigh more heavily or have overbearing methodologies than the other and the aim is to join the two disciplines and their methods in this project. As my own background is in Comparative Literature, dealing with text and theory, the difference between the two disciplines is stark. With books and texts, I was never asked if I was a spy, or if my intentions generally were what I claimed them to be. When analysing literature, the context and perspective from which a text is read (e.g., feminist, poststructuralist, etc.) are known to inform the reading, but you are not expected to have any effect on the object in a way which changes your material. Nor is physical access an issue; the texts do not need to trust you first. Even if an author or the family member of an author questions your analysis, that is still not the same—you engaged with the text, and the suspicious speaker is a third party.

Human participants provide a reflective element which I have not had to deal with previously; someone—many someones—looking back and assessing me in turn while I do my research. It also immediately became clear that this shift is a fruitful one, that the addition of fieldwork data enriches analysis and writing, and that it brings many sensitivities and risks. For example, I worried that the information I would find might endanger the participants' work or their person and community in some way, and I took extra ethics workshops in the pre-fieldwork stage. But, as others in the discipline had already intimated, fieldwork turned out to be difficult to prepare for. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic cut my fieldwork short halfway through, and while I obtained ethical clearance to continue with online interviews and had already built relationships in the field, for a lot of my interlocutors

this was not preferred—not to mention that they, too, were in the middle of this pandemic—and I had to work with less data than anticipated. In merging these two disciplines, emphasis was placed on the writing-up stage as the place to find this synthesis. Through experimenting with writing exercises from different focal points, asking different questions, considering the literature or theory or my positionality or all of the above, and expanding some of them into chapters, I have attempted to look at the connecting tissue in my research and the disciplines at large. This introduction serves to detail the foundation of the interdisciplinary project and expand on the methodological framework. What is, then, the methodology of research between these two disciplines and their methods?

The methodology throughout this thesis is not only interdisciplinary, but comparative, as it seeks to articulate the politics of literature in relation to literary representations of WWI by English, German, and French authors, and in relation to testimonies and ethnographic insights collected through work with two sets of participants: peace (or anti-war) activists of Voices for Creative NonViolence (VCNV) in the UK and the US (active in the south of England and Chicago, Illinois), and the regimental association the Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades' Association (MGC/OCA), a remembrance group active in the UK (with some US members). The interdisciplinarity approach brings together theory, contemporary research and lived experience. To this end, I have applied the method of 'abductive ethnography' across both disciplines. As Vida Bajc (2012) describes, abductive ethnography does not follow a predetermined set of research questions, but the data collection allows for and 'embraces serendipity and allows intuition to guide the fieldwork' (73). It is in such a way that there was space for the prevalence of certain ideas, concepts, and continuities which came to light in the field. It is with the insights and questions prompted by the field that I returned to the corpus, and was able to investigate and interrogate anew, asking different questions. I organised the data through recurring themes in the fieldnotes (such as 'endings,' 'neutrality,' and 'truth') which have become guiding principles in my chapter formation. Bajc indicates that through abductive ethnography, '[t]hemes can be derived from the disciplinary knowledge of the ethnographer or from the indigenous, cultural knowledge of the people studied' (2012: 80). It is in this constellation that the various elements of my interdisciplinary research come together. How does the fieldwork with remembrance groups and peace activists inform my critical (re)reading of my WWI corpus?

The literature of the corpus was identified first, as the process of finding and identifying potential fieldwork groups took (and was expected to take) longer. The primary corpus of WWI literary texts consists of: *Le Feu: journal d'une escouade* [*Under Fire: The Story of a Squad*] (1916) by Henri Barbusse, *Undertones of War* (1928) by Edmund Blunden, *Im Westen nichts Neues* [*All Quiet on The Western Front*] (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque, *In Stahlgewittern* [*Storm of Steel*] (1920) by Ernst Jünger, and *Testament of Youth* (1933) by Vera Brittain. A rather canonical corpus when it comes to WWI literature, in the sense that however they came to be defined as such, 'the canonical works […] are always available. They are made so by virtue of the kind of attention paid them in the past, and, in a continuous tradition of interpretation, paid them now' (Kermode 1988: 265). Continuously in print since their publication, these works have been among the most read of European WWI literature (by authors who lived through the war). My attitude toward the literary corpus in this thesis is one of addressing and unpicking the existing corpus in relation to the fieldwork, rather than engaging with literatures which have not been previously known. This allows for the analysis of the interaction with a literary work over a prolonged period (over a hundred years) and map and engage with the changing reception and politics of that work. WWI constitutes a crisis moment within a larger debate in which ideas about the human and war, such as who fights in them and how they ought to be fought, have been challenged and need to be reimagined after over a hundred years of modern warfare.

My selection of the corpus came through the consideration of the WWI works' longevity, cultural relevance, critical engagement, and availability in English (a point I will return to below) in the last hundred years. I also considered their origin, selecting them from the main European countries which fought on the Western Front (France, Germany, UK). These works set the tone of the (WWI and contemporary) war novel as a genre (see Löschnigg and Sokołowska-Paryz 2014). Before I had identified my fieldwork groups my selection was also restricted to combat novels written by veteran authors who served in WWI. This left me with: *Under Fire*, *Undertones of War*, *All Quiet*, and *Storm of Steel*. The addition of *Testament of Youth* to the corpus came through the fieldwork, as one of my interlocutors regularly engaged with the book. I have elected to engage with my corpus in English, reading it either in the original English or in translation, as not doing so would favour

different parts of the project.[2] WWI narratives which have been translated to English have a different genealogy to originally English texts. The English-language markets remains one of the biggest, with global reach. Texts which have not been translated reach readers more directly—i.e., the words are the same as they were a hundred years ago—while arguably this is not always the most 'readable' version of a text. Language is constantly changing and evolving and a hundred years later a text can seem dated or simply become hard to read. *Le Feu* has never been out of print, but is over a hundred years old, and this is visible in the language, the syntax and grammar, making it less accessible to contemporary French readers. Meanwhile the latest English translation is from 2003, by Robin Buss, and will thus inevitably have updated language that is easier on contemporary readers.[3] This level of access to these texts further informed my choices concerning the fieldwork. The choice to focus on UK- and US-based interlocutors in combination with the Anglophone primary texts came through practical concerns, angling to fully engage both disciplines without favouring one over the other. Engaging with the original French and German is necessarily limited, as described above, and my abilities in English far exceed those in French and German. Due to fieldwork necessarily being placed in the second year, even language study would still result in a different level of comprehension compared to the two English texts. It would limit my access and understanding in specific locales if I chose French or German field sites.

My initial approach was to find (Anglophone) readers of these texts, but the reader perspective proved rather artificial in practice, as I had researched and established my literary corpus in the first year, before heading into the field. The structure of the joint degree had led to the favouring of the Modern Languages component pre-fieldwork; both my supervisors and I were aware that because of the nature of data collection in Social Anthropology, the latter would need to be the focus during fieldwork. I did produce literature reviews while in the field, as well as fieldwork reports, but this meant that had I stayed committed to the reader perspective, either that or the literary corpus would have to be forcibly made to fit the other. In my search I came across the MGC/OCA. The MGC/OCA is a regimental association in honour of the Machine Gun Corps (MGC), a fighting corps

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[2] In the case of *In Stahlgewittern, Im Westen,* and *Le Feu* I use the original titles only when specifically referencing the original texts. Translations are provided when relevant on word level and I use shorthand titles throughout.
[3] Both this translation and the original 1916 translation by Fitzwater Wray are readily available in the UK and US.

created in WWI and disbanded only seven years later. The OCA engages with WWI and its legacy in the form of remembrance and responded positively to my initial questions. The ubiquitous presence of the machine gun in WWI (narratives; memory), and the MGC/OCA's historic situatedness as the OCA of a corps that no longer exists was particularly interesting to me, as this suggested an engagement with materiality and remembrance.

The connection between the MGC/OCA and the literary corpus is seemingly straightforward; the MGC/OCA could even be called canonical. I feared their juxtaposition would not challenge but be subsumed in the existing national narrative (in the UK) around war and the place of WWI narratives. Fieldwork showed reality to be more complex, but I was interested to establish contact with another type of community which occupies itself with war in a way which is distinct if not opposed to the engagement of remembrance. Veteran writers seemed appropriate in terms of writing practice or content, but this would also create a rather insular combination of text and participants, a feedback loop of veteran writing. Veteran activists or peace activists were another option, considering the parallels with the positionalities of the authors of the corpus and their direct engagement with war— and because of my personal preference for groups with an explicitly political engagement with war. While initially wanting to investigate the way WWI narratives influence our view of contemporary war and those who fight and die in it (civilian or military), working with peace activists provided an opportunity to surpass the limitations (and (historical) situatedness) of the elements of my research thus far.

Out of the peace groups I reached out to—and out of those who replied—VCNV was the one group who said they explicitly use war narratives in their peace activism. This was not restricted to any specific corpus, but ranged various wars, including WWI, and witness accounts. Although I reached out to the MGC/OCA and VCNV due to my interest in the contemporary relevance of WWI texts, I must stress that reading the WWI corpus was not central to the activities and outlook of the two groups I worked with, and I am not providing an ethnographic account of their reading of the corpus. Rather, I seek to provide sideways entries into an interdisciplinary method. The complexities of multi-sited ethnography (Fisher 1990) were compounded through my choice to engage with these distinct groups. The nuance present here will be teased out; the MGC/OCA perspective is not simply an illustration of hegemonic national narratives of war remembrance, nor does VCNV only have a non-normative connection, as my analysis will show.

The method of moving between the data from multi-sited fieldwork, the theory, and the literature of my corpus, is one requiring critical engagement and experimentation. Many possible avenues might seem productive from one angle, but close again when considering all the data and the ways they might or might not intersect. Identifying the times and moments when everything lines up is an easy trap to fall into, while it might be exactly when the research does not line up that the interesting things happen. One of the ways in which I have attempted to counter this bias, is by writing thematically rather than by place, group, or discipline. Dividing the thesis by discipline would create a stasis that would be contradictory to the experimental and interdisciplinary nature of the scholarship. A challenge of the multi-sited fieldwork with different groups is that seemingly interesting and relevant data is spread across a huge range of people, subjects, times, and places, and consequently, that choosing or cutting certain parts might move the overall thesis in a different direction.

The writing experiments ultimately shaped this thesis, ~~allowing the data and disciplines to interweave rather than splitting the thesis along disciplinary lines.~~ Additionally, my engagement with the literature changed because of the fieldwork and vice versa. What was highlighted through the fieldwork, was the issue of my own positionality. Or what I would call, within this experiment, my 'Dutch perspective'. Dutch in the sense that I was born and raised in the Netherlands, went through the Dutch education system (which had its own relation to war and the literary canon), and speak (and write) from a primarily Dutch context. It is also a Dutchness which comes to me by way of the former colony one of my parents is from and holds this sense of 'otherness' within it. Notions of nationality, foreignness, Dutchness, and national cultural memory are thrown up by my being a foreign presence in my fieldwork groups, and immediately problematised. The fact that the Netherlands was neutral in WWI is relevant to my reading of the corpus and of the commemorative practices that I engage with in my fieldwork and allows me to bring in that Dutch perspective, as it were. A lens which is in turn diffracted on since I am both half Dutch and mixed race, inhabiting both a national and a diasporic identity. The objective was to combine the critical analysis of literature with anthropological fieldwork so I might gain new insights in the politics of these literatures. How the fieldwork groups view war allows me to put different questions to the canon.

Frank Kermode (1988) dissects the canon as both a mnemonic device and linked to selective institutions from the outset (because 'to include some things in a list and omit others implies selection'), establishing them as instruments of political and institutional power (258-9). He also emphasises that extratextual indications or commentary (among which this thesis could be counted) are fundamental to the history of canons; 'it guarantees that the words are as they were originally yet makes commentary a necessary complement of the text' (Kermode 1988: 260). The aim is to critically revisit these texts which have been an accepted part of the WWI literary corpus for so long. The canon is changed and comes to us rather more as works in a special position, which additions would (somehow) modify; we read differently after the reading the commentary (Kermode 1988: 266). And so, in effect, it is this meaning of the canon and a wide casting of commentary to include interdisciplinarity and multi-sited fieldwork which have become a core part of my methodology. My reading, enriched by my specific positionality, and informed by the fieldwork, analyses what this synthesis brings and reveals a different reading of WWI (literature) and the way it is engaged with. This thesis thus enriches the canon by offering a set of new perspectives gained through the interdisciplinarity of this project and the question of my own positionality.

In selecting the corpus, it was important to think about how the critical reading of literature would work alongside and in tandem with ethnographic work. The anthropological fieldwork would necessarily only involve presently living subjects, and to then venture out to different time periods in the literature would skew things on an analytical level. Therefore, I have limited the corpus by focussing on literature of one war. This implicitly and necessarily curtailed my ethnographic work while also giving me a natural link to, and continued focus on, the present. It had become clear that WWI as an originary point had such influence on later war writing, cultural memory, remembrance, commemoration, and activism (as they pertain to my research), that there was a rich cultural, literary, and theoretical tradition to engage with (see Löschnigg and Sokołowska-Paryz 2014). WWI was a world-wide war, fought by empires that spanned the globe, but most of the important battlefields were in Europe. The Western Front became emblematic for the WWI battlefield, in no small part thanks to *All Quiet*: a novel which landed on a cultural bedding of years of news reports about the battles taking place and the lives lost there.

The selected narrative accounts concern a war that has imposed a significant change on the technological possibilities of modern warfare and the subsequent effects on the

people fighting them: WWI was the onset of industrial warfare in which the soldiers on both sides were exposed to never-before seen weaponry, leaving the soldiers feeling they were fighting machines more than other soldiers (see Saunders 2010; 2004; Gray 1997; Ostendorf 2016). It is considered to have birthed a new genre of war writing, both in terms of poetry and prose. The wider literary WWI corpus is one which has set the pace for war writing in a situation we have come to call 'modern war'. The idea that the soldiers who are fighting a war are its victims is prevalent throughout modern war literature in which the subjects are often 'ordinary soldiers' rather than the kings, demigods, and generals of older war writing. The best-known narratives in WWI show soldiers coming to the battlefield, surviving, but being forever altered. In *Men at War* (2014), Christopher Coker articulates the shift around (First World) War writing as follows: 'For the historian, war continued to be epic; for many novelists it became tragic' (3). While not all novels fall in this exact category, it is this 'ordinary people' element which the five novels of my primary corpus focus on this new militarily and soldierly normal. As McLoughlin, Feigel and Martin point out in their introduction to *Writing War, Writing Lives* (2017): 'War affects life writing and lives affect war writing' (1). These 'ordinary soldiers' are the ancestors of many people in the UK (and elsewhere) and their stories bear an entirely different weight and importance to them and their lives than it does to me as a researcher and a Dutch national, as the Netherlands were neutral in WWI. This difference has become an integral part of this research. What is produced in this space of difference?

The differing notions of the WWI soldier as he comes forward in the literature of this time, comes with certain implications, and the necessity to consider the literature alongside the politics of both the author and the time that they write and have been received in. Additionally, in the European countries which participated, and in some of their settler colonies such as Australia and New Zealand, the experiences described by veteran-authors were echoed by the soldiers that returned from WWI and by the gaps they left behind when they did not. Consider, for example, that the poem 'In Flanders Fields,' the imagery of which has become so ubiquitous in British WWI commemoration, was written by a Canadian: physician Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae.[4] The (traumatic) experiences of the families of

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[4] See Appendix A for the poem and the manuscript.

soldiers, whether they returned home or not, similarly reinforced notions of victimhood over heroism and the soldiers as the true losing party on all sides of the conflict.

This thesis breaks open the canon by enriching it with a set of new perspectives made possible by the interdisciplinarity of this project and the question of my own positionality (and thus my critical reading). This framing allows me to do original critical work which, following Kermode, allow for a different reading of the canon through my commentary. How can the remembrance and activist work my interlocutors are involved with be engaged with alongside the corpus in a fruitful manner? What do these WWI texts bring my interlocutors, and me? How to navigate these nodes between literature, affect, commemoration, positionality, and activism? What happens to research when pushed out of one's comfort zone? Through an interdisciplinary and intersectional lens, this thesis seeks to provide a sideways entry into the (reading of) literature, to re-articulate how a (canonical) corpus might be read—and how such a reading might influence my fieldwork in turn. Kermode postulated: 'The duty of interpretation is to make modern' (1988: 265), and the different angles show that this interpretation is not restricted to one discipline by any means.

Field Sites and Interlocutors

When I went into the field after a year of preparation in 2019, it was to join the two distinct groups, which now consisted of members of the regimental association Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades' Association and peace campaigning Voices for Creative NonViolence. MGC/OCA is an organisation with the principal purpose of remembering the men of the Machine Gun Corps. The Old Comrades' Association was founded by veterans of the MGC shortly after the end of WWI and although the last of the veterans have passed away, the association still survives to this day. There are several reasons for joining. This could be because of kinship ties to a veteran, for remembrance, genealogical research, interest in the history of the corps, and the materiality and history of the machine gun. Most of the OCA's members are descendants of the men that served in the corps during WWI, but some have joined out of an interest in the history or the Vickers machine gun.[5] Different generations are

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[5] British machine gun produced by Vickers Limited for the British military and deployed between 1912 and the 1960s. This is the gun the MGC men wielded.

represented in the respective organisations. The bulk of the OCA members is retired or close to retirement, and all that I have met are white from all over the UK. This generation represents both the last surviving children of the MGC men (now well in their nineties), and their children. Much of their interest comes from the silences and voids that wartime family members left behind. Oftentimes, the generation of grandchildren (and sometimes the generation after them as well) have joined with or in honour of their parents and/or grandparents. There are some younger members in the MGC/OCA, but Judith, the Honorary Secretary, has pointed out that there seems to be a lessened sense of urgency and 'emotion' in that generation. Members come from all over the UK and sometimes even the US; WWI regiments were regional entities as a rule, but the men in the MGC were selected based on skills such as technical propensity or marksmanship and thus pulled from other (regional) regiments.

The MGC/OCA is focussed on several set dates annually, during which commemoration takes place on a national scale or is closely tied to past activities of the MGC men. As I use both terms in this thesis, it must be pointed out remembrance and commemoration walk a fine line of division and overlap. Remembrance relates to both individual and communal acts of remembering, while commemoration sooner denotes a celebration or observance designed to honour the memory of persons or events, i.e., whatever serves the purpose of commemorating. However, in the UK one of the most edified acts of commemoration is 'Remembrance Sunday,' with a wide-spun narrative around National Remembrance. With this significant exception I will address remembrance as individual (unless explicitly stated otherwise), and commemoration when it concerns codified events and memorials (commemorative structures). All the MGC/OCA's events take place in the UK and the OCA's calendar has several changing and recurring events. Particularly the Annual Observance in May is a key event, with a significant turnout at the Boy David Memorial to the Machine Gun Corps in Hyde Park in London. Another key event is the annual visit to Grantham, where the MGC men used to train before being sent overseas to the battlefields. Wales is yet another important site, as this is where Judith lives and the MGC's archive resides in her house. Over the years a significant amount of literature, artefacts, even the remains of the uniform worn by a soldier that was recently found and reburied in Flanders, have found their way into the archive.

When, where, and how WWI started is hotly debated and differs for the countries involved (see MacMillan 2013a; 2013b), but in this struggle the consensus appears to be that 'The Great War was nobody's fault or everybody's' (MacMillan 2013a: xxx). Four of the empires that initially went to war disintegrated, but in France, Belgium, and the UK, a space for WWI commemoration had been opened up (MacMillan 2013a: xx).[6] In *The Thought of Death and the Memory of War* (2013), Marc Crépon argues that the memory of war takes shape through commemoration (1). People such as the members of the OCA play a vital part in keeping this memory alive through their active participation in national commemoration practices, while also moving from an often personal and affective position, as shall be further examined in Chapter I.

Judith Lappin joined the MGC/OCA in 1993 and has been its Honorary Secretary since 1997. Her grandfather served in WWI as a machine gunner. He, and in many ways his son Tudor—her father—is the reason she joined the OCA. When she joined in the 1990s several veterans were still alive, but now even their children are getting very old or are not around anymore. Her grandfather, Wilfred Prew, tried to get an exempted job in the mines but was still drafted into the military and sent to France, where he was eventually killed by a sniper. A couple of times Judith makes a comparison between WWI and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As she puts it: 'They are wars under false pretences, the veterans are sleeping in the streets, and the war already lasted longer than WWI and WWII combined'. At the time in 2019, these soldiers were still deployed, with no end to the war in sight. She finds the war in Iraq an embarrassment: 'Its generals, everything. They lied and soldiers went'. She empathises on the level of the 'ordinary soldier' who are 'ordinary people' no different from her grandfather and his corps, fighting and dying in WWI.

These contemporary wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are precisely what the VCNV protest. My fieldwork with VCNV took place in St Leonards-on-Sea and Chicago, with both the US and the UK branch. The US branch of VCNV rent an apartment (2 top floors) in Uptown Chicago, a neighbourhood that is becoming more gentrified; I have been told it looked very different a few years ago. The house has three rooms on the main floor, and an

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[6] MacMillan states: 'Russia, which had ruled over many subject peoples from Poles in the west to Georgians in the east; Germany with its Polish and overseas territories; Austria-Hungary, the great multinational empire at Europe's centre; and the Ottoman Empire, which still included pieces of Europe as well as today's Turkey and most of the Arab Middle East' (2013a: xx).

attic that is being used as a room, which also has an extra bed and futon. VCNV members there live in community; 2 to 4 people live in the house, and in principle all actions and meetings will be organised from the big table in the front room. People can live there rent free in exchange for work for the organisation, such as meet on set days for meeting or leafletting in the streets (fig. 1).

HELP STOP THE IRAN WAR

On the day *of/after* **a U.S. attack**, please gather at 5:30pm at Trump Tower – the day *of* the tragic attack *if* it occurs before 3pm.

Email us at info@vcnv.org to receive local protest updates.

...and our friends at
CODEPINK.org (women against war)
send excellent **action emails**
on Iran ... takes seconds to sign up!

Fig. 1. Leaflet that VCNV members Sarah, Sean, and Buddy were handing out in Chicago

While such set dates are planned, their activism is mostly reactive and responds to current affairs. In St Leonards-on-Sea, the VCNV UK office is based in Maya's house. As opposed to VCNV in the US, the UK base is her home first, and an office second. VCNV in both countries organise different actions, such as protests, lectures, and peace walks, but members have also been arrested for protests as wide-ranging as blocking a highway and planting corn on nuclear missile silo sites. Their actions are geared towards the promotion of peace, and this can take different shapes, from breaking sanctions by bringing medicine to civilians, to directing action in their own countries, to pressuring their governments.

Originally VCNV was started in the US by Kathy Kelly. At VCNV, Kathy is the main figure, who has been a peace activist for decades. She is not the official leader, as their decision making happens communally, but she is the face of the organisation. Over the years Kathy Kelly has been involved in various peace groups which were focussed on different war zones at the time, such as the first Gulf War and Bosnia. In 1996 she founded the activist group Voices in the Wilderness (VITW), which was active until 2003. Some of its prime objectives were to bear witness and break (US) sanctions by bringing medicine to civilians in

affected areas. VCNV was created when VITW disbanded in protest of a fine the US Treasury Department imposed on them. Committed to challenging US military and economic warfare against Iraq and other countries, active nonviolent resistance lies at the heart of VCNV's activism. Although they also focus on other issues and countries (such as sending delegations to Iran), this has shaped their activism over the last decades. VCNV members cover a broad scope generationally speaking. Some of its founding members are of retirement age but due to their commitment to activism, conventional retirement is not a lived reality for them. Both younger and older members are actively involved in the organisation and its practices. Regarding their structure over the course of a year, much of the activity depends on political developments.

Maya was my main interlocutor and gatekeeper during my first months of fieldwork in St Leonards-on-sea. She was born and raised in Hackney, London, and studied history in Liverpool. During this time, she did an internship with Kathy and VITW in Chicago shortly after 9/11 and took the initiative to start VCNV UK upon her return. Between 2011-2018 she went to Afghanistan every year, staying with the Afghan Peace Volunteers (APV), sleeping at the Peace Centre rather than going to the 'green zone' and connecting with local people, who she says have become her friends. Initially she asked me if I wanted to join on her next trip, but as Afghanistan superseded Syria as one of the most dangerous countries in the world due to the 'randomness' of current bombings, this never materialised. Even before the pandemic and withdrawal of western troops, it became so dangerous that none of the VCNV UK members have been back. Kathy still went at some point in 2019, but she never stayed for long because her presence can also be dangerous to people there. Their security is the main objective in their activism, attempting to make their circumstances better by either aiding them there, or through UK/US politics, by 'bearing witness' and educating the public at home on how war affects local people. As Maya told me: 'I've been to Afghanistan nine times now, so I've seen it first-hand: how war just aggravates everything and makes things much worse. It hasn't liberated people. It's just crushed them into further poverty and brought more corruption and more instability'. Maya told me this in conversation about her activism while seated at her kitchen table, and the presence and role of the homes of interlocutors as a space for living as well as remembrance or activist work was prevalent with Judith and Kathy as well.

The MGC/OCA and VCNV have some obvious differences between them. Their meeting structures were already mentioned, and remembrance services are quite different from protests. They are different in their basic action, but also in the risk one might take (virtually none in the case of a remembrance service, but potentially severe in the case of activism) or the way these must be organised (year in advance, with a sign-up form or impromptu, responding to current affairs). As a regimental association which was started by veterans of WWI, the OCA might be critical of parts of WWI, it is in its conception not critical of the military institution but flowed from it. VCNV is an activist group focused on peace and alleviating the harm that befalls people in warzones. The only times they work with military elements are when they deal with veterans who are now peace activists, or when they are met with military personnel or other people who support the things they protest. Often, introduction into the MGC/OCA starts with a familial connection, while I have not seen this to be the case with VCNV.

There are also points and moments when the MGC/OCA and VCNV do touch. Generationally speaking most members in both groups are of pensioners age and there are only a few younger members. Within the UK, both the MGC/OCA and VCNV are structured similarly. They exist and function dispersed, but there are certain nodes of activity. Both the MGC/OCA and VCNV are essentially run by women, from their homes. Their manifestations—remembrance or protest—take place in public, rendering porous the border between protest and commemoration. This means that their presence sometimes invited commentary from the public around them. For example, Maya was arrested in October 2005 during a protest which made a connection between contemporary British soldiers WWI soldiers. She was reading out the names of British soldiers who had been killed in Iraq in the years since the 2003 Iraq War, while standing opposite the Cenotaph war memorial in London. Protesting within half a mile of Westminster had been made illegal under Section 132 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act ('Demonstrating without authorisation in designated area') in 2005, and Maya was the first person to be convicted under the Act (Evans 2006). On the side of the remembrance, Judith told of the time when passer-by yelled at them to *'stop glorifying wars!'* as they were singing a hymn during the annual MGC/OCA observance—something she was still furious about. For Judith, the observance directly involved their dead kin—which was treated disrespectfully—while the passer-by might have

had more contemporary issues on their mind, but for a moment the two points of interest converge in important ways.

In the Field(s): Bodies and Research

Participant observation as a practice was new to my methodological toolkit and joining these groups both as a participating member and as an observing researcher was a precarious space to be navigated for various reasons. My positionality soon showed to be acutely relevant in my research. Positionality references the position one has or adopts in the world, as well as one's worldview; the social and political context not only of the research but of our own relationship to it (see Holmes 2020; Cunliffe and Karunanayake 2013; Rowe 2014). What does this mean for my research? Before I answer this, the question of positionality warrants briefly addressing the colonial roots of the discipline of Social Anthropology.

It has been said Social Anthropology is a discipline in which mainly white Western/European/American researchers study 'nonwhite' people (see Lewis 1973; Pels 1997; Pels and Salemink, eds. 1999; Ben-Ari 2000; Faier and Rofel 2014). Even if this view of the discipline is not universal or necessarily accurate anymore, it is not remedied by stories such as that of one of the founding fathers of the discipline, Bronislaw Malinowski, referring to his interlocutors by slurs in his fieldnotes. Or that of the Schweinfurth expedition in East Central Africa, which aimed to gather information on head-hunters in such a biased manner it generated a market for severed heads.[7] As Diane Lewis (1973) summarises:

> Colonialism structured the relationship between anthropologists and non-Western peoples in the past. Fieldworkers conducted their studies as a form of privilege, one of many they exercised through membership in the dominant group. Their work was pursued in the interest of the colonizers in terms of the concepts and theories they developed as well as the roles they played. (590)

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[7] On this expedition Schweinfurth 'intended to find evidence of cannibalism and headhunting, and his own actions—especially the collecting practices he employed—were virtually guaranteed to elicit the very evidence he sought. First, he offered trade goods in return for evidence of such savagery. These were exchanges in which he paid, or otherwise solicited, the peoples he encountered to produce signs of their savage nature, or to enact his own European fantasies of primitiveness. Second, his journey through central Africa, accompanied by a large armed escort and acquiring skulls along the way by a combination of violence and trade, was itself a sort of headhunting expedition' (Harrison 2012: 240-1).

Writing at a time when many independence wars were still waging, Lewis pointed out colonialism was not a thing of the faraway past and placed question marks by some traditional ways and aspects of 'doing' anthropology. In *Multisituated - Ethnography as Diasporic Praxis* (2021) Kaushik Sunder Rajan argues that although anthropologists have disavowed their discipline's colonial inheritances, ethnography as a practice remains based on a practice which objectifies the 'native informant' in a way central to colonial reason (1-2). He argues that if the root remains colonial, so does the consequence (ibid: 2). Lewis further traces these roots: 'Given the significance of anthropology as a tool in Western man's search for self-understanding, it was an important methodological assumption that the study of the "primitive" non-Western world could take place only from the vantage point of the Westerner or outsider' (Lewis 582).

On both a personal and research level I must consider this: Lewis published her article on anthropology and colonialism two years before my mother's native Suriname gained independence from the Dutch colonial regime (in 1975). The world in which anthropological research takes place has changed, and the practices have shifted—but not always completely. As Amrina Rosyada (2022) points out, for example, the historical role and praise of white anthropologists remains in place, while their native assistants who did much of the labour still reside in obscurity. And speaking on conducting ethnographic research with social justice movements, Marianne Maeckelbergh (2016) emphasises that 'since anthropology as a discipline has the tendency to research groups of people who are marginalized and in positions of relative powerlessness, meaning that the stakes are high for any group being researched' (228). These dynamics persist in the cultural imaginary as well. Once again, I must ask: how does this influence my research?

To bring awareness to these colonial structures, Lewis suggests 'perspectivistic knowledge', which she explains as 'a knowledge which is partial and which views reality form the particular existential position occupied by the observer' (1973: 586). Within feminist theory it is Donna Haraway (1988) who is credited with the introduction of the notion of 'situated knowledge', and both perspectivistic and situated knowledge are essentially the same as the now-established feminist notion of positionality. Haraway's inherently spatial argument about how knowledge claims are situated is one of the foundational elements which underpin feminist and queer scholarship (Simandan 2019: 129). It is within literary

and gender studies that Haraway's work on positionality has been most prevalent, accounting for the social and political context that creates one's identity—race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, class, all these elements influence the point of view from which we see the world—and thus read any text. This is not unlike the way Merleau-Ponty places the body at the centre of his worldview, following his conclusion that human perception is what happens before thought and feeling (Holmqvist 2013: 546). The body is thus seen as '"the pivot of the world" through its capacity for pre-rational sentience—the bodily experience of feelings such as anxiety, rush, exhilaration' (ibid).

Intersectionality, as described by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is posited as a way to address these intersecting elements of one's positionality and the way they influence the reading of (in Crenshaw's case) a text.[8] Crenshaw explains that intersectionality is 'a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves,' thereby creating obstacles which are traditionally overlooked or not understood, even in conversations about feminism or racism (Crenshaw 2018, 0:07-0:33). She continues: 'Intersectionality isn't so much a grand theory it's a prism for understanding certain kinds of problems' (ibid). At its basis, positionality is about power relations. Positionality claims knowledge is always situated rather than objective—in a certain time, body, ability, race, movement, and so on. While intersectionality accounts for the differences this creates and gives a prism for understanding and approaching these not one-at-a-time but as compounded issues. In relation to the tensions these issues create, Sunder Rajan proposes to consider ethnography as 'multisituated'; something which is inherently part of the diasporic experience as it speaks 'to all manner of intersectional intellectual, political, and biographical trajectories, and it calls for a "decolonization" of method and discipline' (2021: 5). Accountability lies not only within the disciplinary reproduction, but in 'multiple communities of practice' (ibid: 1). What, then, does this diasporic positionality mean for my fieldwork? And, in turn, what does it mean for my literary analysis?

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[8] Crenshaw specifically speaks of the marginalisation of Black women, as she explains: 'I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. [...] [T]he intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated' (1989: 140).

As colonialism has inextricably—and tellingly, visibly—left its mark on my (family) history, meant a challenge to the previously mentioned anthropological dynamic where the people who are researched are in positions of less power in comparison to the researcher. Inverting and challenging these colonial dynamics is at the heart of decolonising work, which aims to address and dismantle the biases of history in the present—work which I consider to be good practice and which I aim to contribute to. Relationships of power can be ignored when you are at the top of the (self-imposed) hierarchy. At any other (lower) position, this is precarious because it directly influences everything from access and personal risk to the data you might gather. As an observer who aims for objectivity while also a subjective participant with a specific positionality, my participation knew limits, which were marked along specific lines. There are many ways in which my interlocutors are privileged, and there are many ways in which I share their privilege. The peace activists I spoke to in the US were all US citizens with the ability to travel in and out of international war zones. My own passport is a 'strong' one, I cannot even think of countries I would not be allowed to visit with it. I have never had to think about my identifying documents in a sense of flight or forced migration. My city of birth is a capital, and its name is recognised when people read it of off documents, even when I am abroad. Consequently, although I lacked the privilege of an American passport (or citizenship) while in the US with my interlocutors, a European one felt like the next best option. In the UK I was informed I would have to try hard to get deported, but that even arrest was unlikely if I just listened to police instructions. On the side of paperwork, I felt like I could be extracted from most situations, should any protest 'go south'.

And then there are some ways in which my interlocutors are more privileged than I. There was a generational difference, as most activists and MGC/OCA members were white people of retirement age. This was particularly relevant with the activists, as this afforded them a certain safety. Racialised police violence in the US has been well-documented over the last decade, and previous trips to the US had taught me that what while being mixed race might often be 'read' as ambiguous in Europe, this reads as Black in the US. This knowledge caused necessary apprehension, as protests usually draw police presence. As Judith Butler has been quoted saying: 'there is always one thing true about a public demonstration: the police are already there, or they are coming' (Hedva 2022 n.p.).

Theoretically I might count on embassies and consulates, but in practice escalations are known to happen quickly and without checking people's ID's first. It must be pointed

out: none of the protests I was present at escalated, and I took my own precautions. For instance, not holding banners or props, but such considerations were an integral part of joining my interlocutors at the protests they attended. These preparations are particularly relevant in relation to protest, the nature of which in these two locales has to do with the way one (is allowed to) take up space in public spaces. It also has to do with the nature of much of modern-day activism; direct action and civil disobedience are dependent on one's positionality even if its definitions ignore this element sometimes. In *Direct Action: An Ethnograph*y (2009) anthropologist David Graeber describes direct action as the insistence on acting as if one is already free when faced with structures of unjust authority or injustice: 'One does not solicit the state. One does not even necessarily make a grand gesture of defiance. Insofar as one is capable, one proceeds as if the state does not exist' (203). He adds that this typically includes a willingness to accept the legal consequences of one's actions (ibid).

When it came to the MGC/OCA, the conditions were less precarious, as they did not host events that drew a large police presence, on top of the fact that all their events took place in the UK. Racialised police presence is a problem in both locales, but the use of firearms among them (and the entire population) is decidedly less common in the UK than it is in the US. However, both the activism of VCNV and the remembrance of the MGC/OCA take place in the public sphere. It entails revealing one's support for certain issues, people, or actions, in a way which I normally avoid because it comes with certain risks like arrest or police violence, but also aggression from onlookers and others. VCNV members plan nonviolent actions, such as manifestations in the streets or peace walks, and sometimes 'arrestable actions' where they are aware that one or more of the elements of their action might lead to arrest. These arrests might lead to media attention and the resulting court cases might establish new precedents within a case law system (which the US and the UK operate under). For example, there was a spontaneous march in the streets of Chicago after Iranian general Qasem Soleimani had been killed by a US strike. The march was legal but going onto the road by lake Michigan that was classified as a highway would be an arrestable action. People have the space to decide for themselves if they want to be arrested or not. The element of arrest has consequences of its own, as most will go on people's permanent record. For someone who has decided to dedicate their life to activism prison time might be the only consequence, while for someone with a job, like Sarah, a

Chicago nurse and VCNV member, getting arrested will result losing one's job and is therefore not an option. Most of the activists I have met lived in community (VFP were a notable exception), establishing amongst themselves farms and community structures that indeed, as Graeber suggests, can be said to act as though the state does not exist. I would argue, however, that integral to this acting-out of a different kind of community, is the active struggle *against* the state. Rather than acting as though the state does not exist, they act in accord with their own beliefs in the first place, and this causes them to protest certain parts of the state (Graeber 2009: 203; Rancière 1992; see Chapter II of this thesis).

The act of looking and being looked at, being aware of your own positionality also means being cognisant of the positionality that is assigned to you by others. These dynamics reach far beyond researchers and interlocutors, but with the explicit aim of acting ethically as a researcher, these considerations are brought to the forefront. If I went somewhere with my interlocutors, I was made aware of my position in the fabric of society. Whatever asymmetrical moments have occurred in these relationships; they were firmly grounded in questions like those introduced above: Am I a spy? What information will I gather? What will I do with that information? For activists the question might be: Am I a researcher like I say I am? For the MGC/OCA the concern was more likely to be: What will I say about them and their kin?

Where it comes to my positionality, as a woman of colour who was always younger than her interlocutors, this potential (historical) power imbalance did not feel tipped in my favour. At times it was in my interlocutors' favour, and then there was a whole realm of interaction outside of our direct engagement where I had to be more cautious than them. Not knowing who you might be dealing with at first online contact, I would make sure to mention my heritage because I know that when people hear 'Dutch,' they think of someone blonde and blue-eyed. While this does not always directly equate to harm, having to counter, explain, and not alienate people when they make well-intended but usually at least mildly racist remarks, creates an emotional fallout that is taxing to deal with and puts a strain on further data collection. In everyday life I would bar people or disengage from situations which feel (potentially) unsafe, while in the field this would have meant cutting protests and entire trips short.

Tied to these concerns there are the ways these relationships shift once we would meet and interact. Before starting the fieldwork, this is what I considered, and all I could

imagine of the practice of fieldwork was going to visit someone for months on end and trying on their life like you would a scratchy jumper. Reality was more like this: sitting at breakfast next to the Aga in Judith's kitchen while she makes me perfectly poached eggs and serves home-made marmalade. Maya who has increased the size of the veg-box she gets from a local farmer because I am there, and us cooking together. Or Sarah, one of the VCNV activists, who drove all the way to Iowa and back with me (who cannot drive) in the passenger's seat. I was drawn into sets of relationships and made to explore what it meant to relate to others. The people who hosted me were very hospitable and showed me incredible generosity. At times, fieldwork also meant getting very ill and being 6605 km from home and unsure if you can afford to go to the doctor in the US or having a panic attack while in the basement of a church, but my interlocutors at the different field sites housed me and fed me, patiently and passionately explained things to me, divulged in details of their work and life, and prompted me to critically consider my own position, opinions, and (re)actions. As shown, this meant that my field sites were particularly dynamic, had shifting power dynamics, and gave me insight which I had access to precisely because of who I am and how I was read in a space. To answer what this means for my literary analysis, I must first address two intersecting key discussions of war literature that concern my thesis: truth and translation.

How True Are You

War is considered to be beyond 'ordinary' experience and war writing concerns two things which are widely viewed as unrepresentable: war (see McLoughlin 2011; Coker 2014; 2015) and physical pain (Scarry 1985). The notion that the new type of warfare that emerged with WWI was in fact so new and horrific that it had become incommunicable has become widespread. Most of the WWI canon is broadly considered to display anti-war sentiments in their gruesome portrayal of modern warfare. The horrors of WWI are the main means by which the memory is mediated—from the notion of the trenches to that of grand-scale loss at the home front. This is no small part down to the veteran-authors of the time, and the way their home countries absorbed their stories into the national narratives of WWI. On a personal level I have always been fascinated by the fact that so many would call their war

experiences incommunicable but that there were still many who would try. What happens in the representation of something deemed untransmissible? How did authors attempt to translate their experience to narratives meant for others—for unknown readers? What was deemed most important in that practice? Kate McLoughlin states in *Authoring War* (2011) that war 'resists depiction, and does so in multifarious ways. […] Yet, even as it resists representation, conflict demands it' (7). There might be many different reasons for the perceived imperative to represent war. According to Margot Norris, literary war texts give shape to 'the veteran's urgency to tell an untellable tale to home front audiences' (2000: 58), while McLoughlin hints at a few other possibilities:

> to impose discursive order on the chaos of conflict and so to render it more comprehensible; to keep the record for the self and others (those who were there and can no longer speak for themselves and those who were not there and need to be told.); to give some meaning to mass death; to memorialize; to inform civilians of the nature of battle so as to facilitate the reintegration of veterans into peacetime society; to provide cathartic relief; to warn; and even, through the warning, to promote peace. (2011: 6-7)

Whatever the reasons behind the publication of these novels, between 1916, when the war was still very much going on, and in 1929, a decade after its end, the authors of the selected corpus took to paper to translate their perceptions and experiences to a public. And it seems that ideas of 'truth' or a 'personal truth' were an important part of these individual efforts.

As veteran author Edmund Blunden describes in the preliminary to his *Undertones of War*, veteran-authors might be unsure for whom their narratives were intended. Was it for the fellow-veteran, who could not be told anything new, or the civilian, who could not understand even if they read their text?

> Why should I not write it?
> I know that the experience to be sketched in it is very local, limited, incoherent; that it is almost useless, in the sense that no-one will read it who is not already aware of all the intimations and discoveries in it, and many more, by reason of having gone

the same journey. No one? Some, I am sure; but not many. Neither will they understand—that will not all be my fault. (Blunden 7)

Questions pertaining to the 'truth' of the text, such as whether this a 'correct,' or 'true' representation of events in wartime, distract from the focus on the literary text's methods and effects—its literary representation. But what kind of truth is being discussed here? People do not agree on one kind of truth, or even which is most important, nor is there a consensus on which is 'the most truthful' among WWI accounts. This project seeks to look beyond the authorial intention behind writing war. The way these texts are read, analysed, used, and re-read has my focus.

Genre is part of this discussion on truth. WWI novels as a genre are considered to represent 'modern war' that WWI heralded and would become the norm thereafter. Nil Santiáñez (2016) contends that the literary problem that lies at the root of WWI literature—the representation of total war—is that it 'is a phenomenon that can be shown, but not said' (304). As discussed, the issue of genre in this context primarily has to do with concerns around truthfulness. The novels can all be addressed as individual cases, making up the balance between memoir, fiction, autofiction, and other forms, dividing percentages, figuring out exactly where they sit, but this would be to delve into the quantitative, the labelling aspect of it. Liane Schwarz (2001) points out that the narrative recollections are for the most part assumed to 'replicate the facts as faithfully as possible, even if the account is deliberately fictionalized' (239-40). Virtually all WWI novels have been subject to criticism on the truthfulness of their descriptions at some point in their published lives. In these cases, the question of what constitutes a 'truthful' account can take precedence over questions of literary or narrative form, causing neglect of literary elements. Additionally, there are various claims to truth within different literary genres. Poetry, for example, carries assumptions about truthfulness that are different to that of narrative prose. Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" (1920) is read as many things—a voice of a lost generation, the disillusionment with warfare, patriotism, modernity even—but never as portraying a sentiment that is untrue, however highly crafted the poetic form might be.

The books of my corpus are novels and autobiographies which are seen as 'true' in varying degrees. Importantly, because the authors were soldiers and a VAD nurse during WWI, the narratives are necessarily rooted in their own experience of WWI. The return to

their wartime diaries, such as Blunden and Brittain said to have done, is a tangible way of bringing the witness aspect to the forefront. That perspective created is autobiographical work or autobiographical fiction—both are rooted in experience and written in prose. Veteran-authors such as Remarque have given a fictional account, which (is assumed to be) rooted in his own, very real, war experiences. In fact, when it came out *All Quiet* was said to have finally told the truth about WWI (Midgley 2009: 133).

Erich Maria Remarque (born Erich Paul Remark, 1898-1970) was conscripted into the German army in 1916. In July 1917 he sustained injuries and was hospitalized for the rest of the war. *All Quiet* is a fictional account of a German soldier, and one of the best-selling novels of the last century. It is with those horrors-of-war descriptions in mind that Harold Bloom (2009) must have penned his two-page preface to a volume of essays on *All Quiet* (2). He cites Oscar Wilde's adage that 'everything matters in art, except the subject, and all bad literature is sincere' (ibid). Distrusting of fame and popularity, Bloom then reasons that '[w]hat matters most in *All Quiet on the Western Front* indeed is the subject, World War I, and the book is very sincere. It is therefore not a work of art, but a period piece and a historical document' (ibid). In the discussion around 'the truth' that engulfs all war literature at some point or other, the dismissal on the point of 'sincerity' is notable because it dismisses the book as literature. Bloom opines the content is simply true, and therefore only interesting as a factual document. Both *All Quiet* and *Under Fire* are works of fiction with imaginary characters and narratives, but as the authors are veterans, the events are accepted to be taken from life. *All Quiet* is the book which was specifically pointed out to me by someone in the MGC/OCA as written by someone 'who really got it'. David Midgley (2009) found that the medium of prose, and especially memoirs and autobiographical fictions, implied 'documentary authenticity' in the eyes of the reading public (133). McLoughlin refers to 'authoring war' rather than to the specifics of genre over the final shape or genre of writing, thereby giving space to the analysis of varying texts that have come out of the war (2011: 20).

For MGC/OCA members (and arguably this can be extrapolated to encompass most people who are descendant from WWI soldiers), the value of the truth of these narratives appears to be about proximity. Simultaneously, as Midgley would suggest, this does not mean that they feel a fictional account cannot give them a true account of 'what war is like'. The OCA members care for the soldiers and what their lives at the front were like because it

tells them something about the lives of their ancestor. WWI veterans often did not tell them much about their service or did not survive to tell its tales in the first place. The narratives— and the truthfulness of these narratives, through their first-hand experience—by veteran-authors gives the members something they would not normally have. It gives them information and imaginative entry into what that ancestor experienced as '[i]t is this imaginative capacity that readers interested in the First World War value most' (Reed 2011: 152). As Reed points out, literature can function as

> an instrument or alternative site for fieldwork. It can be read for underlying codes of behaviour, values and beliefs, as a reflection or product of wider cultural expressions. Perhaps more interestingly, literature can also be treated as a transposed mode of ethnographic writing. (2011: 29)

In the case of the MGC/OCA these details and imaginings become a part of their remembrance practice. They are a members' group focussed on remembrance, and to *not forget* the stories of these soldiers (whatever is known of them, even if that is just where they were buried) is their primary goal.

VCNV members also aim to remember past wars, but with a different objective than remembrance. Experiences of war are seen (and used) as a deterrent for future wars. The truthful account experiences, deaths, and traumas of the soldiers demonstrates the realities of risking one's life—a risk VCNV wants to bring to the forefront of discussions about war. Veteran's accounts can show that war does not only risk the lives of the opponent, or civilians of either side, but also that of the soldiers who are sent there. The truth that my interlocutors are looking for, then, is both personal and singular in its detail of daily life, and universal in the affects which move us (such as the suffering of war). While there is some overlap, the MGC/OCA is primarily interested in the former and the VCNV in the latter, and these truths are used to different ends. Sara Ahmed (2004) points out in her work on affect that emotions are not simply private matters within a person which move outward, but they 'do things,' and 'define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects' (25-6). Emotions play a crucial role in the generating of individual and collective bodies (Ahmed 2004: 25). Through a textual approach to affect, Ahmed proposes 'that emotions work to create the very distinction between the inside and the outside', creating a

'we' by pushing off against a 'them' (2013: 28), which will be explored in Chapter I. What have these books done since their publication, both in their native countries and in translation?

War in Translation

The experience of war, war at the front lines, is never shared by a whole population, but by a select number of them. Practices such as the draft can enlarge the military population, but a military/civilian dichotomy remains. As veteran and peace activist Joe Glenton points out in his book *Veteranhood* (2021), this is a divide that is actively perpetuated by military training (52-4). In this context veterans—and in the case of war literature, veteran writers—function as gatekeepers to the experience of war up close and personal 'at the front'. When it comes to WWI literature and its literary criticism, there are discussions surrounding the question of form. What are these works? Novels; memoirs; testimonies; hybrid forms? These questions accompany the five books of my primary corpus: prose works which have set the tone for the genre of the war novel throughout the twentieth century. As most of the veteran-authored WWI books are nearing their own centenary, the question of reception is a particularly interesting one as we can see shifting opinions over the course of those hundred years. The way literary works are received at the time of publication need not have been the same as it is now. In fact, the public opinion has quite often undergone shifts that are closely tied to the changing political climate. Two illustrations of such differences are Barbusse's *Le Feu* and Remarque's *Im Westen*.

Barbusse's *Le Feu* came out as one of the first WWI novels, as early as 1916, and is known to have been read by soldiers in the trenches as they were living the wartime events themselves. When *Le Feu* was originally published 'it was widely praised for its truth—this is the key word in positive contemporary reviews' (Palmer 2018: 153). Published well after the war in 1929, the initial response to *Im Westen* was overwhelmingly positive; selling out on the day it appeared but not necessarily striking a chord with veterans of that same war—now all removed from the trenches while reading. The domestic and international sales of the books are an initial indicator of the way a book might have been received by the public

(the English translation came out within a year). Sarah Eilefson's research (2017) shows that *All Quiet*

> sold 200,000 copies in three weeks and nearly half a million copies in three months. The text was quickly translated into twenty-three languages, and these editions sold at a similarly brisk pace. Despite the stock market crash on October 29, 1929, sales had reached 'a million in Britain, France, and the United States together' by the end of 1929. (1)

Meanwhile, original copies and translations of *Im Westen* also famously ended up on many a Nazi book-burning pyre as one of the books was deemed subversive and not in line with the way German politics were heading. *All Quiet* further shows that the reception and the reach of a novel are also dependant on translation. Literary works are published, translated, disseminated, and often find fame through translations and the markets and readers that they are able to reach through those translations. One of the oft-repeated things about *All Quiet* is that it is translated into more than fifty languages, signalling its popularity and longevity across cultures. Additionally, as pointed out in the case of *All Quiet*, 'the English-language novel venerated today is in many ways remote from the original German-language text as well as the translation that early readers would have encountered' (Eilefson 2017: 1). Eilefson's analysis tunes in on four different English-language translations of *Im Westen* and debates the extent to which these translations brought readers closer to or further from the original text—and with that further or closer to 'the reading experience of the postwar public' (2017: 9). She traces 'how dramatically different the editions available today are from Remarque's work as envisioned by the author, as rendered into English by the translator, or as experienced by readers in England and America in 1929' (ibid). The American edition of the novel has been censored and edited to different ends, and as a result, there are different versions of the text in circulation. More interesting than that, perhaps, is what is pointed out about the most popular original German-English translation, the 1929 translation by A.W. Wheen. Eilefson points out that 'Wheen admitted that he was chosen to complete the English translation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* as a result of his shared experience of war rather than his skills as a translator' (3). In the instance of translation of this particular war text it was felt that experience of that particular battlefield was more important than

experience in translating German to English literature. As the case of *All Quiet* shows, the question of truthfulness extends into the translations of these works, where the experience is not sought in theoretical but in experiential knowledge. Here, too, the veteran holds the key to knowledge. What does it mean to translate from experience rather than from skill? It suggests that truthfulness does not lie in theoretical knowledge but in experience—and here, too, the veteran is the one who holds the key to knowledge.

In the case of Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu*, Arthur Marwick (2002) points out that: 'In France the novel won the *Prix Goncourt*, and within a year was translated into English as *Under Fire*, a regrettably literalist title since what Barbusse intended was something along the lines of "The Fire (or Furnace) of War"' (509). The original French was published in 1916 and the English in 1917. Ernst Jünger's (1895-1998) *In Stahlgewittern* kept changing during the author's life because he continued to edit the work, and there exist at least eight German versions. Jünger was among the first to publish on his experiences in the trenches in Germany shortly after the war, in 1920. During WWI he fought in the German army from the start of the war until he was seriously wounded in 1918, ending his tour of the Western Front as a decorated Lieutenant. *Storm of Steel* is a fragmented narrative that is based on the diaries that Jünger kept during his active service at the Western Front. Andreas Huyssen (1993) points out that *In Stahlgewittern* 'became a key text in the construction of what George Mosse has called the myth of the war experience' (7). Huyssen seems of a similar mind to West when he references of Jünger's writing and rewriting of the 1920s:

> Forgetting as an obsessive rewrite project, with each additional layer of text another repression, another exorcism, another piece of the armor. The horror of war rather than horror as literary tradition and decadence […], remains the hidden source of energy of Jünger's writing, but with the years it is increasingly aestheticized, and thus ever further removed from lived experience. (1993: 12)

Despite the eight versions that exist of *In Stahlgewittern* in German, the English has only been translated twice: once upon its first publication and once with the final edition from 1961. Both carry the title *Storm of Steel.* In a review by David Filsell from The Western Front Association, it is pointed out that there exist at least eight different editions in German and that its latest translator, Michael Hofmann, is known to have been critical of the first

German-English translator: 'Hoffman writes that 'his knowledge of German was patchy' (n.p.). The rebuke is illustrated by a list of a considerable number of serious and important translational infelicities and errors' (ibid). Interestingly, the notion of a translator of experience as well as words comes back and it is pointed out that 'Hofmann's own credentials are considerable, although his admitted ignorance of military matters is a hurdle which a number of readers have already highlighted' (ibid).

The reception of Edmund Blunden and Vera Brittain's books, who originally wrote in English, have a different trajectory, as the translations of their works didn't reach the large English-language public in a mediated way. Blunden's *Undertones* is often considered to be canonical or even 'a prototypical representative of the canon of World War I autobiographical writing' (Schneider and Potter 2021: 217; see also Fussell 1975; Schwarz 2001; Edwards 2005; West 2016). Early reviews of *Undertones* showed a preference for its poetry (Schneider and Potter 227), much like later criticism would (see Fussell 1975). This was in part in the acknowledgement of Blunden as 'one of the true war-time poets' (Mégroz 1929: 250, in Schneider and Potter). Despite Blunden's current fame as a war poet, this only came about after WWI, for the first time Blunden published his poetry was in the supplement to *Undertones* (Löschnigg 2021: 40).

Both Brittain and Blunden wrote their memoirs well after the end of the war, after both had considered writing about it before. The reception of these two British authors by critics such as Paul Fussell has been decidedly different. Fussell's analysis of WWI writing is heavily informed by Blunden's writing and limited notions of veterans as combat veterans, while he famously ignored Brittain as a relevant memoir writer in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), even though she was directly behind the front lines as a nurse in France. Although highly influential, the perspective of 'trench' or 'combat literature' as the only true war literature which communicates an experience which cannot be understood unless it has been lived, favours a male, combat-based experience of the war in a way that critic James Campbell (1999) has called 'combat Gnosticism'. To Campbell this type of scholarship is victim to confirmation bias because it is based on 'a certain set of aesthetic and ethical principles that it garners from its own subject' (1999: 203). The ideology in these texts is thus replicated rather than critically engaged with.

However, Brittain saw the front and its injuries as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse and lost loved ones of her generation in that war; her experience of war is also first-

hand, and her words do hold a certain authority. Because of her war experiences her text is seen as being capable of saying something about the human experience in war beyond that specific moment. Brittain's *Testament* details the aftermath of the war across Europe and her efforts towards a more peaceful world, showing her trajectory from a young woman enrolled at Oxford to a form of peace activism. She sought to influence policy and procure peace through political means and had a specific interest in the League of Nations. *Testament* is one of the most successful British WWI memoirs (see Schneider and Potter 2021; Mellown 1983; Bostridge 2008; Day 2015). The first print-run of 3000 books sold out on publication day and in the six years after 120,000 copies were sold (Day 2015). It is also considered to be the only canonical WWI autobiography that was written by a woman (Schaff 2021: 72). As mentioned, I added *Testament* to my corpus as a response to my fieldwork. Kathy of VCNV had used the book in her activism and through Kathy's reading, *Testament* became a nexus of sorts in this project (see Conclusion of this thesis).

Having considered these foundational elements of my corpus, I will briefly focus on the chapter structure.

A Brief Survey

This thesis consists of five chapters, each centred around a different point of convergence for the different questions and interdisciplinary elements of my research – i.e., my corpus, and multi-sited fieldwork. The choice for canonical texts has enabled me to tease out the question of positionality at the interpretative level through commentary which, as Kermode mentioned, is that necessary complement to the text and the canon (Kermode 1988: 260). This has important implications in terms of the debates around the canon, or canon interpretation as a means of making it anew, as Kermode would suggest. Through the work of different scholars and theorists which provide shifting frameworks, this interdisciplinary project aims to provide a prism through which interdisciplinary research with different research methods, methodologies and datasets might be conducted in a fruitful way. In structuring the thesis, the main thread has become a guiding principle is the effect the effect the various narratives and modes of storytelling with which I engage work (on people; in the world). The thematic focus of the chapters facilitates the investigation of these modes.

Chapter I: Endings, begins with the conceptual framing of 'endings' as a way of articulating different stories. This begs the question: Why begin with the ending? The end of a war, the end of an organisation, of a campaign, even the end of lives; reflecting on my ethnographic data, I realised that 'endings' shaped a considerable portion of my fieldwork. The abductive method put forth in this introduction has allowed me to engage with the intersections of the nodes of my research (see Bacj 2012). Beginning with the ending requires articulating different versions of the 'same' story and guided my critical reading of my corpus. The endings present in the literature were compounded by the immanent and actual ending of both organisations that constituted my fieldwork groups. In *The Thought of Death and the Memory of War* (2013) Marc Crépon theorises 'the politics of war' through his reading of twenty- and twenty-first-century philosophical engagements with war commemoration. This first chapter unpicks the notion of 'the end/endings' through the analysis of my selected corpus and the role of commemoration in the lives and practices of my interlocutors: how and to what end are these stories of endings articulated?

Chapter II: Neutral Country, investigates neutrality and the possibility to conceive of neutrality as a fiction. I continue the engagement with my own positionality as initiated above and problematises that positionality and that of my interlocutors by addressing neutrality, access, risk, and privilege. Engaging with Jacques Rancière's work on politics (1999), I aim to dissect the roles of politics and policing in relation to peace activism. What sideways moves am I afforded by the creative positioning of my 'Dutch neutrality'? Can neutrality be viewed as a necessary fiction? And might such fictions prove to be useful instruments for moving from 'reading' to 'acting'?

Chapter III: For Peace, explores how narratives engage with the question of peace, and how these narratives move people to engage with pacifism or other peace work. I address the complicated relationship between war and peace, and the difficulties in addressing it from a moral and ethical standpoint as writing combatants and nurses, as activists and commemorating individuals. The ways in which peace and pacifism are and are not linked, shows how strategic these notions are in the political field and in people's everyday lives. Butler's work on grievability (2009) questions who we deem 'living' and therefore worthy of grief when they die. This distinction is drawn along narratives which establish a hierarchy of life and death which Mbembe (2003) calls 'necropolitics'.

Chapter IV: Machine and Body, considers the machine gun as one of the (textual) voices partaking in the telling of the war. The chapter draws out the discourse around body and machine in narrative and activism. Every British Vickers Machine gun in WWI required a team of six men to operate it, effectively organising the MGC men's sociality.[9] Couplings of the machinic and the human have been extensively theorised in posthuman and cyborg theory (Haraway 1991; Hables Gray 1989; 1997; Hayles 1999). These inquiries into the posthuman (elements in) warfare are examined in the context of the machine gun on the WWI battlefield. How is the machine gun 'voiced' in WWI literature?

Consequently, Chapter V: Configuring the Warscape, focuses on reading anew. I do so through one of the dominant 'myths' in the (constructed memory) of WWI: that of the landscape of war. What is left of the WWI battlefields (as described in my corpus) is extensively engaged with in the present day. My fieldwork experience of a contemporary battlefield tour in former 'Flanders fields,' and the corpus are laid side by side. Through my interdisciplinary approach I offer a new contribution to the analysis and interpretation of the notion of landscape. In the corpus it can be read how ordinary landscapes are transformed into 'warscapes'. These come to us in a register that has become familiar over the last hundred years. What is the structure of the language that builds this landscape? How does the way this discourse is built, in turn build the warscape? And how does reading anew (a combat situation; a warscape; a text) lead to a different way of reading?

The Conclusion: Beginnings, Hauntings, picks up on the question of reading anew (Chapter V), discussing critical and uncritical modes of reading. I draw on Kathy Kelly's reading of Brittain's *Testament* and engage with hauntology to explore the way influence can be felt through narrative and affect. Brittain's outspoken work for peace formed a bridge between my corpus and my activist and commemorating interlocutors, and her role as a mourner of WWI dead is echoed in the WWI remembrance work of the MGC/OCA. How we care for the war dead in remembrance, commemoration, and activism informs the way we relate to the living (present and future). What is my interlocutors' role in this constellation?

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[9] A foundational concept in Social Anthropology, Nicholas Long and Henrietta Moore (2012) 'conceptualize human sociality as a dynamic relational matrix within which human subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, continually plastic and malleable, and through which they come to know the world they live in and find their purpose and meaning within it' (41).

What is mine? How does this intersect with the literature? And how might the answers to these questions bear upon the future?

Chapter I: Endings

Ending the War: Armistice

Shortly after the outbreak of 'the Great War' it was suggested that this war might entail an ending in and of itself, that engaging in this war with Germany would have far-reaching *peaceful* consequences. As one of the characters in the final chapter of Barbusse's *Under Fire* utters: '"There will be no more war," growls a soldier, "when there is no more Germany."' (2016: 366). This line of argument was prevalent around that time and suggested by author H.G. Wells in *The War That Will End War* (1914), which became a catchphrase of sorts. Wells shared the opinion that curtailing German militarism would end this war and give no reason for another, thus ending all future wars before they began. Peace after warfare, as the *logical consequence* of warfare, was posited by Wells and his contemporaries as the possibility of overcoming the repetition of entering war after war. But the Great War, *Weltkrieg,* or *la der des ders* did not mark the end of all wars. WWI was supposed to be many things: a means to an end, a magnificent showcase of modernity, quick and 'effective' with the men home by Christmas. History tells us this was far from the case, the war dragging on for four years, claiming countless victims and greatly contributing to the conditions that created WWII. Paul Fussell said that while every war is ironic because it always worse than expected (1975: 7), WWI was perhaps even more so, as the idea that society was teleologically progressing could no longer be upheld (see Fussell 1975; McLoughlin 2009; Löschnigg and Sokolowska-Paryz 2014; Sherry 2005).

In this chapter I will address the rupture of war and death and how this is narrated through formulations of different endings, both by my interlocutors and corpus, as a way to make sense of wartime events. I will do so by considering the armistice, death in war (in twofold), the apocalypse, and the end of a peace campaign. Utilising the abductive ethnographic method I described in the Introduction, it was through my encounter with endings in the field that I was prompted to move across disciplines and analyse how endings featured in my selected corpus. How do the narratives end? Does the war end in any of them? Are there other endings woven throughout the text? And what does that tell us about narrative endings and the role they play?

The centenary celebrations of the years 2014-2019 point towards the generally accepted end of WWI: the armistice of 11:00 on the 11th of November 1918. It was not the only armistice of WWI, however. There had already been an armistice between Russia and its opposing countries after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire had preceded Germany, which was the last of the Central Powers to sign an armistice with the Allied forces. This last armistice is the central focus of the centenary. It ended the last fighting on land, sea, and air, and that moment is taken as the main reference point to further the national or collective narrative of WWI. In the UK as well as in France, the 11th of November is one of the dates that has persisted beyond its one-time function in 1918. The armistice, in short, narratively wraps up the events of WWI.

The first time I experienced the full ritual 11th of November as a National Day of Remembrance was when I moved to Scotland in 2018. I knew of the annual WWI commemoration but in The Netherlands no such celebrations exist, since the country was neutral in WWI (Chapter II expands on neutrality). When I was in the field, the ritual intensified, as I joined the MGC/OCA at the Field of Remembrance. The grass around Westminster Abbey was sectioned off in plots, and the MGC/OCA tended to the Machine Gun Corps section. Thanks to Judith, I had an invitation and could experience the event first-hand. Two minutes of silence were observed, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex planted crosses and shook hands with those present. A few days later, on Remembrance Sunday, I attended VFP UK's own remembrance ceremony at the cenotaph in London. After the official state parade has finished, they walk to the cenotaph in rows of three, with a banner that reads 'Never Again' (one of the members pointed out it was the hundredth year of the banner being carried) at the front before a wreath of white poppies is laid at the cenotaph. Both these remembrance events were very public, but while the ceremony at Westminster was an official ritual backed by the state and the monarchy, it was clear that the VFP lacks this official support—there were no royals present, and hardly a crowd.

The chosen dates for these events, leading up to Remembrance Sunday and the 11th of November, appeal to the officially recognised end of WWI. Both events commemorate an ending by continuously bringing it back into the present at a nationally chosen and significant moment. In *The Thought of Death and the Memory of War* (2013), Marc Crépon argues that the way the memory of war takes shape, is through the form of commemoration, by which it is in effect 'inflicted on us' as a part of political discourse far

exceeding the way past wars influence relations among states (1). As Crépon posits: 'However we judge the past or the future, our judgment will be haunted, marked by the seal of war in the twentieth century' (ibid). He further points out that:

> The memory of war, in the form of commemorations, punctuates our political calendar with its most "sacred" dates—November 11, June 6 and 18, and May 8 in France. On such dates the memory of war is essentially the memory of those who died in war, the recollection of lives sacrificed, etched in the stone of "war memorials" and in the bronze of commemorative plaques—which governments, in the wake of conflicts, have always erected as reminders, as factors, or *instruments* of cohesion, and sometimes of "union sacrée" and mobilization. (Crépon 2013: 1, original emphasis)[10]

Crépon points to specific moments of commemoration that are intended to take stock or even bring back elements of those wartime events from a hundred years ago. In the UK the fallen of WWI form the core of the remembrance imagery and narratives on a national level. Although commemoration is an element of national and political discourse and action, it is, as Crépon points out, essentially the memory of those who died in war that we return to (ibid). Specific dates of the calendar have been highlighted and posited as the nexus of most important past wartime events in the 'memory' we 'have' of that event. The 'we' at play here is integral to this memory and the national story that is being told. Ahmed (2004) argues that 'emotions play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies' (25). This emotion is appealed to in the process of remembrance and national-scale commemorations. A 'we' may pre-exist the commemorative event but the commemoration functions precisely as a way of (re)creating the 'we' through weaving past and present together via the (both real and imagined) bodies of the soldiers. In the UK, this shapes an '[e]stablishment mode of remembrance' which Patrick Wright argues is 'both militarist and nationalist' (2009: 122).

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[10] The '*union sacrée*' was a political truce in WWI-France during which the left wing agreed not to call any strikes or otherwise oppose the government.

As Hynes delineates, '[m]emory is the mental faculty by which we preserve or recover our pasts, and also the events recovered' (2009: 206). He separates this out from cultural memory, or the social construction of history: 'Without that link—now reaching back to then—you may have an image of the past in your mind, but it isn't memory but something else, a social construction, history' (ibid). The memory that is shaped in this process is a passed-on—but also edited and often sanitised—version of events that is tied to those specific dates and their recurrence. Not dissimilar to Wright, Crépon emphasises that commemoration in this fashion is an instrumentalization of the memory of war to bring about social/societal cohesion, political truce, and mobilization (2013: 1). To establish and maintain this cohesion, government-mandated choices have been made. The attendance and Royal support for the Field of Remembrance—a visually stunning mode of commemoration at a historically significant site—and the lack of such official support for the narrative of VFP—who don jumpers stating that 'War is not the solution to the problems we face in the 21st Century'—would support Crépon's analysis. The Field of Remembrance and the VFP remembrance ceremony tell different stories. The Field focuses on the armistice as the end of WWI (with a tally of the dead), while VFP shifts the focus back to contemporary lives which are lost in war, including their own.

Despite the continued return to the moment the armistice went into effect, the contemporaneity of WWI commemoration means that conversations about it are constantly shifting under the influence of current debates. The question of who is included and seen as relevant to societal cohesion is never fixed, and only now decisions made by the British Empire have their eventual backlash in the UK. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) 'was founded with a remit to remember every individual who had died in World War One, regardless of rank, class, religion or race' (BBC News 2021). Research shows, however, that there have been many cases of 'unequal commemoration', as various news channels report. A review by the CWGC shows that the right to an individual grave that all fallen (and exhumed) soldiers are due, was often disregarded by the Commission when it came to non-white troops (*Unremembered* 2019). The documentary *The Unremembered - Britain's Forgotten War Heroes* shows that these colonial troops are often in unmarked mass graves, are not being commemorated, or only have their names recorded in registers (ibid). Remembrance in this sense functions as a canon, in that

'[h]aving a canon means keeping some things out of it, and defending what is in it' (Kermode 1988: 269).

African troops were not treated equally when it came to burial and subsequent commemoration in site. A poignant example shows a CWWG cemetery with individual headstones of European WWI dead, while the remains of the African troops lie just outside the cemetery's fence in an untended piece of land by the road (*Unremembered* 2019). In response, then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that: 'Our shared duty is to honour and remember all those, wherever they lived and whatever their background, who laid down their lives for our freedoms at the moment of greatest peril' (BBC News 2021). Kermode, too, proposes this opening of the canon rather than a cordoning off; 'to make it more available and more applicable to the present condition of life' (1988: 1270). If WWI remembrance presents the war and the war dead as a wrapping up of events, WWI remains open-ended for these people and their descendants. Moreover, if remembrance can be read as nationalist, as Wright and Crépon suggest, this excludes not only direct descendants but all people (nationals or not) who are racialised the way these original soldiers and labour corps were. They consequently are not granted a claim to the national narrative—or a formalised ending.

When does the war end for whom? Depending on the interpretative measure, the end of the war can be placed at vastly different moments. For many individual companies and soldiers the end of their war did not coincide with the dates of official commemoration. Many soldiers came back wounded, traumatised and disabled or were mobilised in other areas of the British Empire, while whole villages in France and Belgium were wiped off the map completely. Additionally, in the last hundred years, the definition of WWI casualties has been stretched to include more than just those who died on the battlefield or directly after. Soldiers' deaths impacted their families, and the memory of war has become the memory of the dead at a time when there are no WWI veterans left. Such border-blurring events confuse and challenge the notion of a closed-off ending. It must be looked at, then, from different perspectives.

Considering the importance and fanfare of Remembrance Sunday and the weight that is placed there, it is telling that virtually no WWI-era texts end with the official end of the war. Of my corpus, not a single text has the armistice as an endpoint. Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929) ends when the main character dies his uneventful death. In

Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), the narrative ends with Blunden leaving the front on orders to take six months training in England. Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (1920) ends with Jünger in the hospital before the war is over, when he learns that he is receiving a military distinction. Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) does describe the armistice, but the narrative surpasses it, ending many years later with Brittain's decision to get engaged again. Barbusse's *Le Feu* (1916) ends with an almost apocalyptic flood—but not the end of the war. As can be seen from the publication dates, only *Le Feu* was published well before the end of the war and thus there was no experience of the real-life ending for the author to include. The other authors had lived through the armistice and could have included it, but did not. Evidently, the declared event of the text (WWI) need not be aligned with its historical ending and the text might provide a different one. When speaking of literary endings there are a few questions that can be asked. Returning to the question and use of narratives: how and to what effect the do the real and narrative endings I have encountered work? Why or to what effect does a narrative end? What is to be made of these approaches to the war, the front, the subject, and their different endings? 'The end' also poses questions of narrative arches and sense-making in storytelling. Both come into view in hindsight, looking back at events or narratives after they have concluded—or when we declare they have.

In *Time and Narrative* (1984), Paul Ricoeur explains that moving forward (reading, listening) under the expectation that a story finds its fulfilment in its 'conclusion' is what gives a story its 'end point', thereby facilitating the point of view which enables one to perceive a story as having formed a whole (66-7). Narratives are never simply a reproduction of what happened and include an interpretation of the events it references and creates (Müller-Funk and Ruthner 2017: 3). Müller-Funk and Ruthner state in *Narrative(s) in Conflict* (2017) that when a narrative event is ruptured this can mean three things: the rupture is present at the level of interpretation within the narrative, it might be deliberate (stylistic), or it might reference 'a "real" rupture in history or in a certain historical discourse; they relate to a sudden event, to a dramatic turning point' (3). Müller-Funk and Ruthner suggest 'broken narratives'; narrative constitutes continuity through connecting different (disparate) elements, but narrative itself can also be broken (2017: 2).

War is both the rupture and the event which causes the narrative rupture. There exists a tension between the ending that is conjured in the phrasing 'The War that Ends All Wars' and the end that is showing to be relative and manifold. It is within this tension that

the difference between 'rupture' or 'break' and 'ending' or 'end' can be understood. The identification of 'endings' as extremity, termination, conclusion, destruction, death, result, or as the end of a world—or even the world—across the disciplines of Comparative Literature and Social Anthropology allows us to investigate the articulation of these stories—and what end they might serve.[11] This chapter will continue to delve into this.

These endings open space for a national narrative which articulates a 'we' that would neither do away with cultural differences (the literary traditions from which the individual texts come) nor necessarily fall into the problematic universalism and rationalism that WWI has contributed to questioning when it brought with it a form of disillusion when it ended 'the long peace' (see MacMillan 2013a). This suggestion is an elaboration of the notion put forth in Crépon's work, which proposes the idea that the singularity of death presupposes 'a community capable of a "we" that is not exclusive but open to all' (Gasché xxi). In this context, 'sharing death would amount to an affirmation of life' (ibid). How does commemorating the end of the war partake in the (re)configuring of a 'we' through the keeping of ritual, returning to canonical texts, visiting the battlefields, and so on? The answer requires an articulation of different versions of the 'same' story, shaped by different narratives and discourses which in turn obey different codes and conventions. How are these endings structured? What do they tell us? How does considering 'endings' from an interdisciplinary point of view enable me to shed light on different ways of 'making sense' of war in its various contexts? I will start with the story of one man and his end.

Death: Part I

We are, as is most often the case during my time in Wales, sitting in Judith's kitchen. We are having tea with Graham Sacker, one of the MGC/OCA members, while Graham and Judith tell me about the workings of the MGC and the OCA. We are now going through pictures that were taken as part of the MGC/OCA's 'Grave and Memorial Photographic Project'. The aim was to photograph every MGC grave and memorial. As Judith tells me: 'Every one of our machine gunners that we can go to, one of us has been to'. She explains:

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[11] Then there is the view of death as the end of a world or, as Crépon theorises it 'the end of the world as such that each death signifies' (Gasché in Crépon xx).

Each photo was also an *individual act of Remembrance* [with emphasis] by a member of the OCA. The project was to help those who couldn't visit such as elderly sons and daughters. But it became much more, each grave was visited. It's been an incredible project.

The memory of the men who died is actively accessed through the act of photographing these war graves (fig. 2-4). The MGC/OCA's principal purpose is to remember the men of the MGC, something which is often repeated and acted upon. As various members have said, and their website points out in capital letters: 'WE DO REMEMBER THEM'. A resounding answer to the national dictum: 'lest we forget'. The emphasis lies on the life and death of the corpsmen and the way that memory can be accessed and kept alive. The life the MGC lived is approximated through researching the corps and gaining insight into what those war years must have looked like. In Judith's words: 'I really think that it's significant. It's great that you can get a photo but for me, it's every grave has been visited. And not forgotten'.

Fig. 2-4. From left to right: Private E.R. Brownbill, Hamburg War Cemetery; Sergeant. H.R. Barker, Knottingley Cemetery, Wakefield; Private W.E. Gawn, Dar-es-Salaam War Cemetery, Tanzania.[12]

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[12] See appendix B through D for known personal details.

Despite machine guns being part of the war from the start, the MGC was only founded while WWI was already underway, in 1915. Before this point battalions would have single battery of machine guns per army corps, but there was no separate machine gun company. After WWI ended the MGC was deployed in the post-war campaigns of Russia, India, and Afghanistan (Mesopotamia) until it was disbanded in 1922. Theories as to why such a successful company ceased to exist after seven years abound, but the reason is ultimately unknown. The MGC's lifespan illustrates my earlier point that there are multiple endings to contend with when it comes to WWI. The MGC had a reputation of brave frontline fighting and having a high number of casualties, earning them the nickname 'The Suicide Club'. Their position and destructive power meant they were often exposed and aimed at directly by the opponents, and they were the ones who had to run forward onto exposed terrain to set up their gun. For the MGC, war ended with death or the armistice, or even the end of the corps itself.

When the MGC/OCA originally formed in 1925 it was by men who had served in the corps and there were still veterans among the members for many years. The OCA has always admitted kin of those who had fought in the corps, but a military/civilian distinction was upheld until Judith changed this when she became Honorary Secretary. As the MGC itself had ceased to exist, no new ex-military joined and currently it consists of family members of servicemen and those interested in any aspect of the corps. Some are, as Judith puts it: 'all about the guns'. It is unusual for a company not to have an official history published, but there is no official biography of the MGC. Several members told me the documentation could be called 'ill-fated'; many of the company's records were lost in a fire in the interwar years and another section was lost in a bombardment during the blitz, limiting the information available. The OCA members that have committed to writing the biography seem to struggle with these gaps, and the work has stalled. There are some books by individual servicemen, such as *Machine Gunner 1914-1918: Personal Experiences of the Machine Gun Corps* (1973) by C.E. Crutchley, a compilation of personal accounts of officers and men of the MGC and published on behalf of the MGC/OCA, or *The Mudhook Machine Gunner* (1998) by A.C. Mott and D.J. Polley. The MGC/OCA also holds an unpublished manuscript called *Four Wasted Years* by Claude Goodacre, which has been donated to the OCA. Graham Sacker compiled a database of the MGC detailing who was decorated, where they died, and are buried (if known). When that was done, Graham says he thought about

what other information he could add: 'Personal information. Born so-and-so. Born: Dundee, was a railwayman, you know, went to the war, came back. Did this and that. And I could put it on the database so that it would be there forever'.[13]

        As briefly referenced, Judith's reason for joining the MGC/OCA is her grandfather: Wilfred Prew. Prew was drafted up while the war was already underway and ended up in the MGC. Judith's father, Tudor, was Wilfred Prew's only son (fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Left to right: Tudor, Wilfred, Sarah, and Anne Prew (1917), courtesy of Judith Lappin

Judith tells me her father remembered waving his father goodbye as a small boy at the door of their house in Wales, and that 'he never saw him again'. Every time Judith tells this story, she waves her hand the same way. Wilfred never returned from the battlefields of Flanders. This small memory—a mental image passed on from father to daughter—is the reference point from which several strings have spun, stretching over a hundred years. Not only did Wilfred's death affect the lives of his widow and child, but it has also significantly impacted the life of his granddaughter. When searching information for a picture-book she was

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[13] The information on the individual soldiers (fig. 2-4) in the appendix (B-D) comes from this database.

making for her parents' wedding anniversary, Judith realised that she could find very little information on Wilfred and set out to find out more. When asked, her father told her that his mother's new husband didn't allow Wilfred to be mentioned and Tudor grew up not knowing or asking about his father. Over seventy years after his death, Judith took it upon herself to find out what happened to her grandfather after he left that doorstep.

When Judith started researching her grandfather's military service, this led her to the history of the MGC, the national archive in Kew, and the MGC/OCA. Judith describes this as part of 'the ripple effect'. Judith's story relates the wider human cost of war, beyond fighting men there are the families which are left behind. Judith tells me:

> I am not really that interested in the equipment and the uniforms, and you know, the company headquarters. But I like the stories like my own grandfather, I like the stories of real people. Because I'm interested also, as with my father, in what I call the ripple effect. Because this man died, but it had repercussions that went outward. […] I mean I've only ever concentrated on the men and the individual stories because… that's where I came from isn't it? This was about my grandfather.

The ripple effect kept coming forward as Judith and I spoke. It encompasses events ranging from Wilfred's death to the devastation of these deaths on families (like her own), towns, and the nation. Wilfred Prew's death is no simple endpoint to his story. Following Judith's ripple effect, the death of the soldier lies at the heart as the pebble being thrown into the pond. The interpersonal consequences of those directly around the deceased are the rings close to the centre, followed by the influence on the lives of those that are related but not known to the victims (such as Judith). Laura Tradii (2019) points out that 1 in 66 men in the UK had died during the war years (249). This is a point Judith refers to through the story of the Accrington Pals, most of whom were casualties of the first day of the battle of the Somme. She tells me: 'The town woke up and found half their men were dead. Because they were all friends, signed up together. […] Same battle—decimated!' Other far-reaching consequences in the outer ripples include the decision to ban the repatriation of dead soldiers and the Commonwealth commemoration practises we have today. The ban meant that even wealthy families could not bring their kin home, laying the groundwork for equal commemoration.

The genealogical connection to someone who died in WWI is an important motivator within the MGC/OCA. The members display a concerted effort to find out what happened to the MGC men in terms of military movement and personal experience. They try to approach the soldiers' experience as closely as possible through research, the lore that exists in their family, conversation with other members, and imagining this through some of the objects and writing that was left behind by servicemen. Judith's house holds the archive of the MGC, housing artefacts ranging from the regimental silver and medals to unpublished manuscripts, to a bible with a bullet in it that saved a man's life (but this did not turn him religious, an accompanying letter states). No such personal artefacts survive from her grandfather, but Judith has three missives informing Wilfred's family of his death. Apart from his grave in France, the letters are the only tangible objects. There are two letters and a telegram that informed Judith's grandmother of her husband's death. The telegram (fig. 6) only carries the basic information of his death, although the family has never understood why they were sent a telegram as letters were the rule for his rank. It reads: 'R 1601 Deeply regret to inform you 117349 Private W.E. Prew Machine Gun Corps died of wounds at casualty clearance station France on April 14. M A Gun Cor London'.
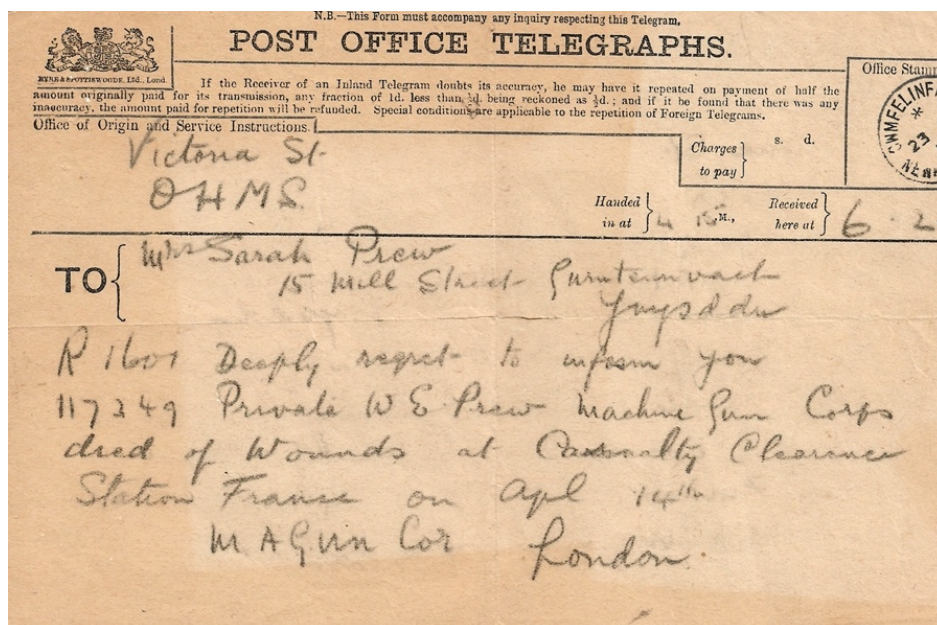
Fig. 6. Telegram, courtesy of Judith Lappin

Judith tells me her grandmother received the telegram before even the letter informing her Wilfred was wounded arrived (see Appendix E). The letter from the reverend also informs

the family of his passing (fig. 7). It describes that he was shot in the lung and died in the night in a field hospital in France. It does not assure her his death was painless. The transcription reads:

15-4-18

My dear Mrs Prew.

I have the sad duty of telling you that your dear husband died here at 4.30 this morning. He had a gunshot wound through the lung and from the very start the sister in the ward despaired of his recovery. He kept up his spirits bravely and struggled on to the end.

I need not add that my heart goes out to you and yours in your trouble. I pray God to grant you courage and strength to carry your burden of sorrow. Along with the many who have worked through the valley of tears in this these trying days.

Your dear husband will be laid to rest with his comrades in our military cemetery under the budding trees.

May God bless and comfort you all.

Yours truly

(Rev) O. F. Cloreys

23rd C.C.S.

B.E.F.

15.4.18

My Dear Mrs Prew.

I have the sad duty of telling you that your dear husband died here at 4.30 this morning. He had a gun shot wound through the lung and from the very start the sister in the ward despaired of his recovery. He kept up his spirits bravely and struggled on to the end.

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Your dear husband will be laid to rest with his comrades in our military cemetery under the budding trees.

May God Bless and comfort you all

Yours truly
(Rev) O. F. Clays
23. C. C. S.
B. E. F.

Fig. 7. Letter dated 15-04-1918. Courtesy of Judith Lappin

The letter which comes from the Chaplain who was there when Judith's grandfather died is by far the most detailed (fig. 8). Mrs Prew is assured that her 'dear husband' died a painless death, despite the fact an earlier letter dated April 12, told his wife that he was shot in the chest by a sniper and 'very seriously wounded'. The moment he was shot is almost three days removed from the day he died, seriously putting into question the statement that he died a painless death. The transcription (left page first, then the right) reads:

> Dear mrs Prew,
>
> It grieves me to the heart to write and tell you that your dear husband passed peacefully away this morning at 4.30. I saw him late last night and he gave me this photo and his purse to send you. He bade me also to tell you that his last thoughts

were of you and that he will await you in Heaven. He had no pain and seemed just to fall asleep. We shall lay him to rest in the little cemetery in the village near by [*sic*]. A cross with a durable inscription will mark the spot where he lies.

The purse which contains a £1 note and about 13 francs I will register and send you. All his other belongings will be forwarded in due course.

I bend my knees to the God of all comfort that he may sustain you in your great sorrow. You have at least the memory of a very heroic gallant and noble lover and husband that is much, also the knowledge that he fell asleep in Jesus and will therefore awake on his bosom and in his likeness.

Any thing [*sic*] I can do for you I will do so gladly. Yours sincerely,

D. MacDonald. 23rd C.C.S. B.E.F.
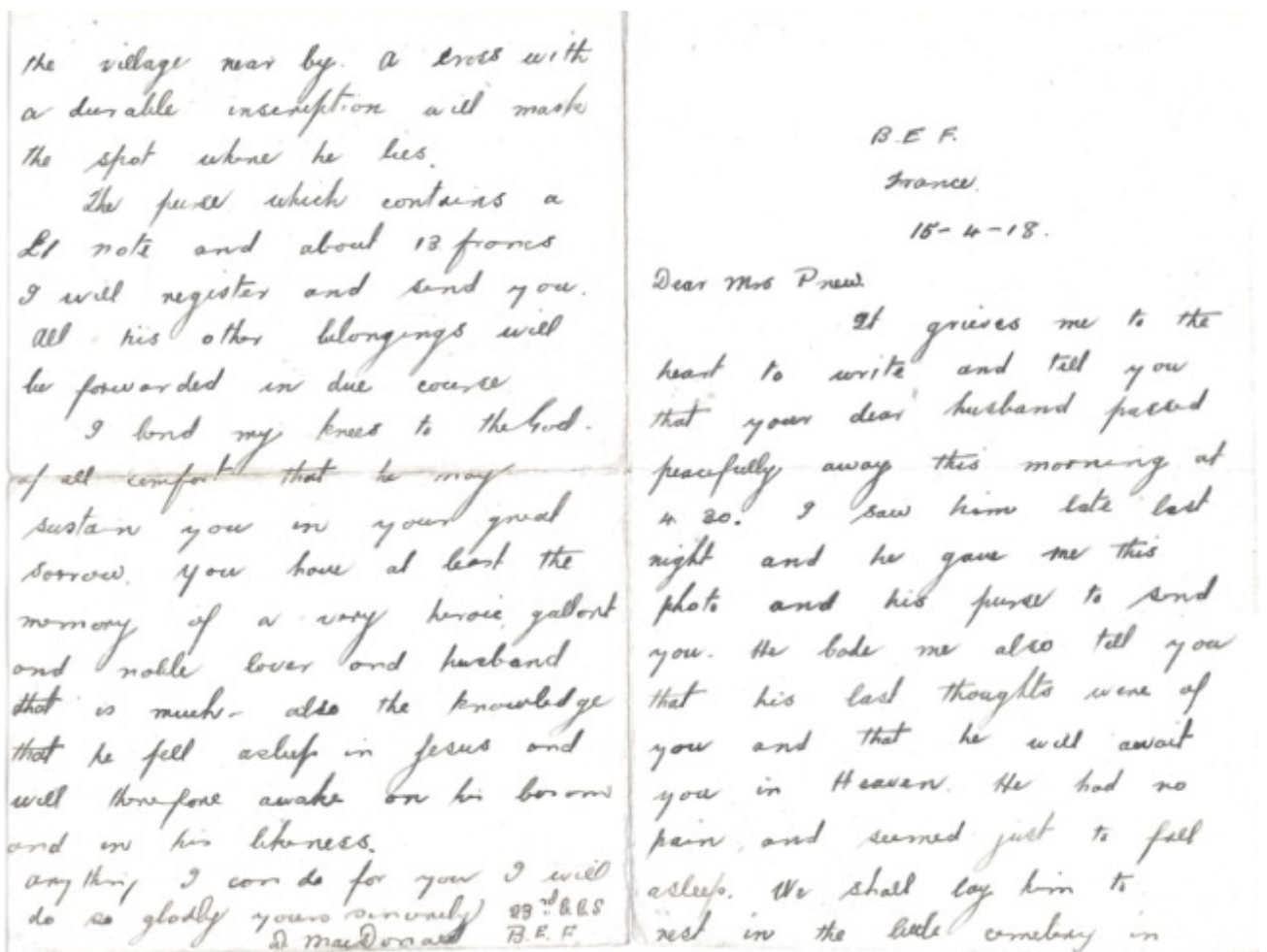
Fig. 8. Letter Chaplain, Courtesy of Judith Lappin

The man described in these letters was not in pain in his final moments but was shot in the lung several days before. He also seemed to know he was dying and asked to assure his wife he was thinking of her in those moments. While probably written down with the thought of sparing his widow, it also suggests this narrative might be fiction—a necessary fiction, perhaps.

These letters that open which such a telling 'It is my painful duty to inform you…' are the material objects that link to a death that has taken place far away from the recipients. They served a specific function, to inform the next of kin of a death, with the seeming extra-function to assure the reader that the death of their loved one was dutiful or heroic, quick, and painless. The letters form an official layer of documentation, of military history, but one specifically meant for surviving kin. They are in and of themselves small, condensed war texts, telling a story of life and death, with fact and fiction hiding in the margins. These letters also constitute one of the tangible pieces of proof that their loved one had in fact died, as many men went missing and British soldiers were not repatriated. The remains of fallen soldiers from British families like Judith's would stay in the country in which they died. The eye-witness accounts and words of their superiors supported the veracity of the news. Outside of their reach through physical location and military and political structures, this type of letter would be the decisive word on the life of their kin, regardless of the truthfulness of the details. Judith seriously questions some parts of the letters, for it is not hard to add the facts together and imagine things might have been different. As she puts it:

> Shot in the lung, took 3 days to die, no anaesthetic or pain killers and so on, but he died painlessly. If no screams from him, I'm sure the screams of others were ringing in every patient's ears. Those Casualty Clearing Stations must have been hellish places to be and work.

To Judith the correct information was especially important when her father was still alive. She describes an instance when she suspected his number was listed incorrectly in an archive, but the archivist sent her away without checking it. When she later turned out to be correct, she says:

I was so upset because by then my father had died. Although Wilfred isn't mentioned in the war diary, nothing much is said so no more information for me to pass on, but there could have been. My father lost his father when he was four and his life for the next tenty-three years was trashed, living with a horrible stepfather, that person at the NAM [National Army Museum] who refused to let me search was unkind. Sons and daughters were alive when I asked, they had a right to know as much as possible and anything which existed.

The imaginative exercise when thinking about Wilfred's last moments adds texture and brings people closer to the lived reality, they feel direct kin has a right to, as everything from those moments to the body to bury were taken away by the war. Traditional rituals of bereavement were made impossible, and the (gruesome) truth became preferable over the official, painless, and sanitised version of events. Though not narrated by the deceased himself, the stories Wilfred's family did and did not tell, the incomplete service records, and the letters the family received together construct a 'personal narrative of war' (Hynes 1999: 205). This is an act of meaning-making because, thus Hynes, as '[s]tories deal with causality and change, and war-stories tell us processes of war: what happened to the teller, and with what consequences' (ibid: 206). Meaning in narrative is constituted through this process (ibid). The function of the ending is that trough it, meaning can be attributed to death (the war dead) by—and for—those that were left behind.

Death: Part II

Considering the 'broken narratives', gaps, and absences left behind by WWI, I want to turn to my corpus. WWI literature is a space which might aid us fill up these gaps opened by the rupture of war, death, and the incomplete accounts left behind. WWI literature might aid us fill up these gaps opened by the rupture of war, death, and the incomplete accounts left behind. Especially the work authored by people who lived through WWI reveals this was no less a challenge for veterans and kin of fallen soldiers who wrote. In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain describes a situation which is essentially the same as what Judith's kin (and many other families) went through. Brittain writes that when she received word of her fiancé

Roland's death, she initially only knows as much as Prew's kin did. Soon Brittain starts to piece together the events:

> Gradually the circumstances of Roland's death, which at first I was totally unable to grasp, began to acquire coherence in my mind. Through letters from his colonel, his fellow-officers, the Catholic padre who had buried him, and his servant whose sympathy was extremely loquacious and illegibly expressed in pencil, we were able to piece together the details of his end […]. (2016: 215)

Brittain initially briefly summarises having gone out of her way to find out more about Roland's death, inquiring with people who were in different ways involved or present when he died—much like Judith did a generation later (with the marked difference Judith only had the written accounts to go by). Rather than in a big battle, it is a small 'unheroic' moment 'devoid of that heroic limelight' which causes the death of the young soldier: Roland was shot by machine gun fire while mending a wire at a section where an enemy machine gun was waiting (Brittain 215). While she was not present, Brittain takes care to pen down the circumstances of Roland's death in detail, describing the bullets hitting him as though she witnessed it herself: 'As soon as Roland reached the gap, the usual volley was fired. Almost the first shot struck him in the stomach, penetrating his body, and he fell on his face, gesticulating wildly, in full view of the company' (216). She must be describing the point of view of someone (or several people) in the company. Perhaps (some of) the people she lists in the quote above. In her own absence during the event—and in his absence thereafter—the reconstruction is the closest she can get to the deceased. The letter is very similar to what Judith's grandmother received when her husband died, but at the time Brittain was able to enquire through letter and to travel to speak to people, while Sarah was left a widow with two small children.

Brittain did not only lose her fiancé; almost three years after Roland, Brittain's brother Edward dies at the front on 15 June 1918. She points out how different the experience of receiving word about his death is, highlighting the discrepancy between the war years 1915 and 1918:

After Edward was killed no wealth of affectionate detail flowed in to Kensington,

such as had at least provided occupation for Roland's family at the end of 1915.

Roland had been one of the first of his regimental mess to suffer wounds and death,

but the many fellow-officers who would have written of Edward with knowledge and

admiration had 'gone west' before him in previous offensives—the Somme, Arras,

the Scarpe, Messines, Passchendaele—that he had either missed or survived.

(Brittain 402)

The intimacy the soldiers' experience amongst each other is an essential element of the way their life and death are related to the family back home. In her brother's case, it becomes clear that to receive more detailed (and thus meaningful) information about their loved one's life and death, the eyewitness accounts needed to come from those with a personal connection to the deceased. The comradeship of the trenches is appealed to by the next of kin.

The concern over the specific circumstances of the death of a loved one, such as described in *Testament*, is something which can be seen in the reality which lies at the heart of these texts. A reality which, as the example of Judith's family and the letters they received emphasises, often starts with one ancestor's military service and death on the modern battlefield. It is often suggested by historians, nurses, soldiers, and kin alike, that either the fabrication of a painless death or not mentioning pain altogether was to spare the deceased's kin. In Remarque's *All Quiet* the narrator is faced with exactly this dilemma but does not hold the 'comfortable truth' of a painless death. At the beginning of the novel his comrade Kemmerich has his legs amputated after being wounded in the thigh. He does not recover and dies a slow and painful death. When the narrator is on leave, he visits Kemmerich's mother:

I must go and see Kemmerich's mother.

*

I cannot write that down. This quaking, sobbing woman who shakes me and cries out

on me: "Why are you living then, when he is dead?"—who drowns me in tears and calls

out: "What are you there for at all, child, when you——"—who drops into a chair and

wails: "Did you see him then? Did you see him then? How did he die?"

I tell her he was shot through the heart and died instantaneously. She looks at me, she doubts me: "You lie. I know better. I have felt how terribly he died. I have heard his voice at night, I have felt his anguish—tell the truth, I want to know it, I must know it."

"No," I say, "I was beside him. He died at once."

She pleads with me gently: "Tell me. You must tell me. I know you want to comfort me, but don't you see, you torment me far more than if you told me the truth? I cannot bear the uncertainty. Tell me how it was and even though it will be terrible, it will be far better than what I have to think if you don't."

I will never tell her, she can make mincemeat out of me first. (1970: 156)

The narrator is adamant Kemmerich's mother will never learn the painful truth from him. He cannot write 'that' down but does not tell her either, keeping the craved-for truth to himself. His 'mincemeat' statement is evocative and darkly humorous in its hint to mutilations in the trenches and Kemmerich's fatal wound and double amputation. The scene gives an insight into the opposing desires to know and to never tell—which show care for the dead in distinct ways. And those with the (eyewitness) information often carried the silence with them after the war (see Benjamin 1936; Kennedy and Tate 2013). Something of the incommunicability and horror of the front seems present in Remarque's description of hesitation. Remarque's narrator displays a moral conundrum: he feels obligated to go and visit his friend's mother but will not share the real circumstances of his death. Shielding his friend's mother form this information shows care for the soldiers and their kin and an attempt at limiting the harm that had already been done.

In the context of the American Civil War, Drew Gilpin Faust suggests in *This Republic of Suffering* (2008) that 'Narratives of dying well may have served as a kind of lifeline between the new world of battle and the old world at home' (31). Brittain, too, describes the initial shared fantasy of heroically (and victoriously) going to the front before such notions quickly disappeared under the conditions of modern trench warfare. The desire to create such a lifeline between the new and old world can be read throughout Brittain's memoir, even before her bereavements. Her initiative to join as a VAD nurse, rather than staying at Oxford, as well as her later efforts for international peace and even the writing of her memoir which is dedicated to her fiancé and brother—they can all be read as such lifelines. Uncovering every gruesome detail of Roland and Edward's deaths rejects the well-

meaning efforts 'to mislead the bereaved' to ease their pain (Faust 2008: 30). Instead, the information aims to bring Brittain closer to the deceased, and later allowed her to narrate their lives and deaths in greater detail—much like Judith aimed to do for her father. In these cases, the family of the deceased is adamant they want to know all there is to know about the death of their loved one.

In *Testament* Brittain describes how she suspects such misleading when she is told how her brother died in battle. The information that initially reached his family about his death was sparse, and she looks for others in her brother's company to find out what happened to him, exactly:

"Where was he shot?" I inquired, as steadily as I could.

Again the young man cast over me his keen, searching glance, as though I were a subaltern whose ability to go calmly "over the top" he was trying to estimate; then he answered curtly: "Through the head."

At that late stage of the War—as I had realised only too well from the agitated efforts of Army Sisters to mitigate truth with compassion in letters describing the last moments of men who had died in hospital—the colonels and company commanders on the various fronts were so weary of writing gruesome details to sorrowing relatives, that the number of officers who were instantaneously and painlessly shot through the head or the heart passed far beyond the bounds of probability. (Brittain 2016: 404-5)

Only later, when 'quite independent' accounts of others which arrive by mail from the Italian front where her brother died match those of the colonel she addresses above, does Brittain seem to believe he had been speaking the truth and 'that he had not been trying to spare my feelings' (2016: 405). What is at stake here, is what constitutes and appropriate 'death story', which ultimately has significance for the view soldiers, kin and loved ones, and their descendants have of WWI and its end.

As noted, *Testament* does not end with the war, but there are many endings present in the narrative. When the war is underway there are many endings in the sense of people—strangers and loved ones—dying. In the memoir this is not the end, although it is strongly related to its eventual endpoint. Once the war has ended, life goes on. The ending

is not tied to war or peace, but rather to the aftermath of the war and the grief that has become part of her life because of it. It becomes clear just how all-encompassing WWI was, how it sent shockwaves—ripples—through society even after it was over. The memoir ends with the end of her single life, after she eventually gets engaged again after losing Roland. Crépon observes: 'When we preserve the memory, when we commemorate the victims, when we make of the remembrance of sacrifice an ethical and political responsibility, it is above all this time that is remembered' (2013: 6). Both Judith's grandfather and Brittain's narrative demonstrate the ways in which WWI-era military life, responsibility and comradeship intersected with death and kinship outside of the trenches from WWI to the present.

The way the stories of the deaths of Wilfred, Roland, and Kemmerich are told emphasise the importance of narrative endings—both on the level of textual analysis and that of the fieldwork. These moments where my fieldwork and corpus intersect demonstrate that the boundary between Comparative Literature and Social Anthropology is far more permeable than their disciplinary borders might suggest. Comparative analysis widens the perspective and our understanding of these layered narratives and their functions. All five works of my corpus contain numerous endings of individual lives in WWI. The accounts also move back and forth between the micro to the macro, surveying the battlefields and the many lives lost and back to the individual. How these characters view the death and destruction around them is teased out in the notion of one specific ending: that of the apocalypse.

The Apocalypse

As indicated, none of the texts in the corpus end with the end of the war, but there is one which ends with the death of the protagonist. *All Quiet*'s Paul Baumer dies at the end of Remarque's novel. The war is still ongoing at the conclusion of the narrative and as readers we never experience the official end of WWI. Baumer's death is the only moment in the narrative where the protagonist's narrative voice is absent. Or rather, is 'absented' as his death is what ends his ability to narrate as a living soldier. His end comes before he can bring his account to a meaningful conclusion. The end of his life is reported in a very matter-of-fact way, with an added hint at the end of the war: 'the canteens hum like beehives with

rumours of peace' (Remarque 1970: 247). The descriptive comparison between canteens and beehives hints at the use of the soldiers in WWI; as worker-bees, the executing and not the deciding branch. The simple style without lyricism or pathos and a seemingly direct reference to the language of an official report contrasts with the brutality of what has happened—and has been happening throughout the text. But then the book ends with:

> He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, that the army report confined itself to the single sentence: All quiet on the Western Front.
> He had fallen forward and lay on the earth as though sleeping. Turning him over one saw that he could not have suffered long; his face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad the end had come. (Remarque 1970: 248)

The mention of peace, and omission of the armistice, comes while the war is still ongoing. There is no end in sight for the narrator who contemplating a life and future before dying only two months before the armistice. This war ends with his own ending. The last line picks up and amplifies the sense of resignation expressed in the last paragraph voiced by the narrator, as well as creating a mirror image: Baumer goes from standing and narrating his own life, to the new narrative voice that steps in and finds him fallen. The violence of death is offset by the description of his peaceful face, 'as if asleep', a familiar trope in war literature (see Palmer 2018). This is also the moment the title enters the narrative: at the very end. It brings the narrative full circle and strengthens the sense of foreboding which hangs over the text as so many people surrounding the narrator die before he eventually does too. We are given the sense that the war, the state, the weapons—none of them care about the death of this individual soldier. The entire narrative has shown the particularity of the lives of a handful of soldiers, but this death matters so little in the grand scheme of things from the state's perspective, that it as though nothing happened. And even though someone just died, it is all quiet on the Western Front. This circular move also begs the question: will this happen again and again? The war ended for this individual soldier, but the war itself goes on, and many soldiers will face the same fate without it ending the war.

This ending which is simultaneously the new start echoes Hillis Miller's words on death as an ending: 'Death is the most enigmatic, the most open-ended ending of all. It is

the best dramatization of the way an ending, in the sense of a clarifying telos, law or ground of the whole story, always recedes, escapes, vanishes' (1978: 6). The death of the narrator would suggest that there is a clear ending, but that belies the complexity behind such a move. Hillis Miller states: 'The best one can have, writer or reader, is what Frank Kermode, in his admirable phrase, calls "the sense of an ending"' (1978: 6). The life of the narrator, the book—it all ends, but is there a conclusion? The implication seems to be that this is what happens in war. Soldiers are not only felled in grandiose battles (such as in the opening of the novel, when the narrator is but one of a handful of survivors) but also in small, quiet moments. The narrative of *All Quiet* is interrupted, rather than ended. In the introduction to *La Clôture Narrative* (1985), Armine Kotin Mortimer poses that character development, or the death of the character, might conclude a narrative and provide an ending on the grounds of change (17). But closure and change are not to be collapsed into one category. Closure, taken as 'the sense of completion or resolution at the end of a literary work or part of a work' such as a stanza or novel, is helpful to consider in relation to the issue of war (Baldick 60). It can be seen as a decision or declaration on the one hand, and a solution or outcome or resolution of a problem on the other. Casting WWI as the solution and resolution to the problem of war follows this logic.

In *The Sense of an Ending* (1966), Frank Kermode discusses 'fictions of the End;' fictions that imagined the ends of the world. Kermode's analysis is to 'provide clues to the ways in which fictions, whose ends are consonant with origins, and in concord, however unexpected, with their precedents, satisfy our needs' (5). Kermode starts with an analysis of the Apocalypse. The Apocalypse is an ending that points towards a more linear than cyclical structure because it denotes something final. It is an endpoint, the decided closure. The basis of this fiction—which is not to say it has no basis and life and history because it is a way of making sense of the world—lies in the Bible. As Kermode summarises it: 'The Bible is a familiar model of history. It begins at the beginning ("In the beginning...") and ends with a vision of the end ("Even so, come, Lord Jesus"); the first book is Genesis, the last Apocalypse' (1966: 6). The Apocalypse entails the complete final destruction of the world, as described in the book of Revelation. The structure of Apocalypse is predetermined, and humans exist between the beginning (Genesis) and the end (Apocalypse)—or as Kermode words it, an 'imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future' (8). Kermode further points out that most interpretations of Apocalypse assume that 'The End' is near,

not something in the far-off future. In relation to WWI literature and of my corpus specifically, the nearness of this Apocalypse, even the contact with it at certain moments during the war, indicates why it might be that these narratives do not end with the official ending of the war. The importance of the Apocalypse as an event overrides the formal ending of the war.

This can be seen in Barbusse's *Under Fire*, a novel that is heavily influenced by notions of apocalypse. Scholarship continuously highlights this quality and theory and criticism point to the way Barbusse's writing 'deploys a rather apocalyptic style' (Pinon 858), refers to Barbusse's likely view of the war as a 'social apocalypse' (Smith 388-9) and describes the end of the book as 'apocalyptic' (Palmer 156; Risterucci-Roudnicky 909; Jones 222-3; Evans 3), to name a few. *Le Feu* was first published in serial form in the summer and autumn of 1916, the book form came out that December, and won the Prix Goncourt of that year (Palmer 2018: 153). Palmer points out that, while reception was not unequivocally positive, it *was* successful 'with 150,000 copies sold in less than a year […]; by the Armistice, it had sold 216,000 copies and continued selling fast thereafter' (ibid). This success was sustained; the novel has not been out of print (ibid: 154).

The squad at the centre of the novel is a group of individuals of low rank (there are hardly any officers present in the narrative), and the twenty-four chapters show different aspects of a soldier's life in and out of the trenches. Barbusse's text is primarily concerned with this squad and the way the war makes them move through space—the landscapes in which they find themselves are described in detail as each chapter drops us into a different place and situation. One might say that the main organising principle in *Under Fire* is space, rather than time (Santiáñez 2016: 311). Palmer observes that in each chapter 'some externally driven event is shown to the reader through the actions, words and feelings of the participants, none of whom is more central to the narrative than any other' (2018: 155). The final chapter of *Under Fire* ends with an apocalyptic flood—but not with the end of the war. While it is the last chapter, it lies at the heart of the narrative. After the flood, the soldiers from opposing sides get up and try to regain their bearings. Among the characters there is talk of the end of the war and its conditions, but despite the momentary respite from the war in the aftermath of the flood, it is not over. Among the soldiers, the question of 'the end' is raised as the soldiers get up from the mud try to make sense of the war and its circumstances. They question its motives and use, who controls the war and them. It has

become clear to them this is about something bigger in which the soldiers are but players. Revolution is mentioned, but not undertaken, as something which might put a definite end to war once and for all (before the 1917 Russian Revolution did exactly that). The soldiers, it has been established in this final chapter, are the 'poor countless workmen of the battle, you who have made with your hands all of the Great War [...]' (Barbusse 375). However, in the penultimate sentence the men get ready to 'begin war again' (Barbusse 379). War is represented as cyclical and potentially endless, forever beginning again. Alongside the linearity that is suggested by the notion of apocalypse the last pages of *Under Fire* hint at something revolving, something happening again and again. The ending is put under tension by this paradox of the simultaneous representation of a move that is both linear and cyclical. Paradoxically, the apocalypse can be repeated.

The final lines of the narrative oscillate between these linear and cyclical approaches to war. One is the end of all things, including war, the other implies an endless reliving of states of war and peace. A more apocalyptic view seems to win out, however: 'All the rest, aye, all the rest, in the past, the present and the future, matters nothing at all' (379). Their return to war, however, is a move 'to rejoin the others and begin war again' (ibid), and thus the pendulum swings back again. The narrative plays out a structural impossibility, but is the treatment of impossibility not, as Nigel Rapport observes, precisely that: 'fictional?' (2017: 216). Fiction is exactly the place in which the conditions of this impossibility are teased out. It is hinted that there is to be a continuation of the old, and so the apocalypse brings the soldiers much insight and promise, but actual change is made to feel unlikely. It is only a battle that has ended, one section that has flooded. The fighting will resume and has never stopped in other places—not for the workmen of the battle that wield all yet none of the power. Perhaps its wartime authorship and publication are the answer here; how to imagine the end of a war that marches on? Worker's revolt and apocalypse are the two options the text offers up, but even within that 'imaginative prediction' (Kermode 8), the end of the war turns out to be impossible to conceive—and war stands to begin again. The war is both over (for a moment) and not at all—both for the soldiers and the author at the time. This endless recurrence is one which is especially fitting in this modern war, where battles were fought over the same stretches of land, again and again. As Gilbert and Gubar (1988) point out: 'Even the name modern historians have given it, World War I, defines the event as merely

the first in a series of global apocalypses' (259). Embracing this insecurity of the world at war, the apocalypse closes the story, for now.

The apocalypse demonstrates that even the most dramatic and seemingly all-encompassing endings allows for regeneration and rebirth. This generative aspect of 'endings' came forward in the fieldwork component of this interdisciplinary project as well. As it turned out, the MGC/OCA was looking at ending the organisation while I was in the field. This did not initially seemed to fall outside the scope of my research, but when I had to leave the field due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and as the months of lockdowns and restrictions progressed, the activists in VCNV started having this conversation was well. These endings quickly moved from the imagined into the real and practical and in turn allowed me to reconsider and rephrase what an ending might be in the context of this research.

Ending Operations: Peace Out

Seated in a different kitchen, in St-Leonards-on-Sea this time, but with tea again, Maya from VCNV and I are having a conversation. I want to ask her about one specific arrest that I have heard bits and pieces about but never the whole story. But when I ask her how she got into peace activism, she brings it up herself.

Maya: And then arrests here and there, one of them was quite high profile, in 2005 when we were protesting the Iraq War in Downing Street and I was arrested, and it was under this new anti-civil liberties law called the 'Serious Organized Crime and Police Act' and I ended up being the first person prosecuted under that law. So, then that was a big sort of media fanfare around that and that really changed my life. Because I was always a kind of behind the scenes back-office kind of person and then suddenly, I was shoved into the limelight, and I had to go on loads of TV shows, travel across the country, do lots of talks. So that really rocked my world and I think it changed me a lot as a person.

T: What was the protest exactly?

Maya: I was reading the names of British soldiers who died in Iraq and Iraqi civilians who had been killed. And it was opposite the Cenotaph so that is obviously, like this time of year [early November], with remembrance, a very traditional place that you go to, to remember the war dead, and to honour the war dead. So, the fact that I'd been reading British soldier's names, meant that I had widespread support across the board. Even The Daily Mail carried a front-page story saying, you know, "Land of Free Speech Abolished" or something like that, so even the Daily mail was—

T: —Was on your side [laughs].

Maya: [Laughing]. Was on my side! Which was like, pretty incredible.

Both the US and UK branch showed an active peace organisation, in the UK mostly involved with campaigns to call attention to the then ongoing war in Afghanistan (which was entering its eighteenth year), and in the case of Maya, joining local politics so she might change things through policy. As Maya voiced it: 'I'm looking at it as a form of radical change, revolution, sharing, redistributing wealth, having a peaceful foreign policy'. In the US VCNV were organising peace walks, delegations to warzones and collaborating with other peace groups. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic this all changed. The work that they usually did, particularly the delegations, had become impossible during the pandemic and after many discussions VCNV US officially ended their campaign in the winter of 2020. VCNV UK continues under the same name, but the original US headquarters in Chicago are closed. Dissolving one organisation and continuing the work under a new name is in line with the organisation's civil disobedience—an integral part of their activism—as they would never pay a fine to a state whose actions they oppose.[14]

When talking about the ending of VCNV, Kathy speaks of 'the end of the campaign', but if this is a campaign aimed at a certain end goal, has it been successful at the time of it ending? Ideally one would be able to close down a campaign because the goal has been achieved. However, this is not the case here. Although peace and remembrance are both potentially endless projects, there is a sense of coming full circle with the MGC/OCA after a hundred years, while this is not there for the peace activists. As a campaign, VCNV started

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[14] Kathy's peace campaign before VCNV, Voices in the Wilderness (VITW), ended in response to a state mandated fine.

from a very different position. In the closing statement on their website VCNV expressed gratitude to those that were with them, 'working towards a more peaceful world'. The use of the present continuous is key here, as it implies the campaign might have come to an official end, the work has not. Their final newsletter reads: 'We'll […] close our operation at the end of 2020. Yet, we'll surely look forward to continuing our activism. Our efforts to resist wars and to build peace will continue, but in a modified form'. The newsletter goes on to explain:

> During this time of pandemic, we've learned to craft new means of outreach and activism. We haven't been able to form delegations, organize walks and lengthy vigils, or travel as itinerant educators to various communities as we have in the past. […] we recognize reality has now shifted.
>
> We're no longer able to visit our friends in Afghanistan and elsewhere in person. This greatly changes our ability to support and learn from them and their projects as we were previously able to do […]. We recognize organizations must adapt and change in response to changing circumstances. (Kelly 2020: n.p.)

This ending emphasises that there is still work to be done, albeit different work than before. The pandemic has changed things in an unforeseen way, and rather than waiting until they are able to travel back to Afghanistan, they decided to look for new ways of taking action. The end of a campaign implies a resolution; an issue is solved and therefore the campaign is no longer necessary. Peace is a complex and multi-headed notion, meaning different things during different times in different countries. Advocating for peace in the way that VCNV does involves direct action and the pressuring of government(s), leafletting, bearing witness in war zones, and so on (see Chapter III). For VCNV the end is renewal, returning to the work the way we have seen war returns.

Alongside the COVID-aided ending of VCNV in its current form, there was the ending of the MGC/OCA on the horizon. The MGC/OCA plans on officially closing and ending the OCA. When I was in the field it had been almost a hundred years since the MGC was disbanded, and it seemed fitting to those leading the association to end it on that anniversary (1922-2022). Interest had been declining, Judith suspects because there are no more living MGC veterans, and their kin are further removed from wartime ancestors.

Judith has pointed out that children and grandchildren have been very invested but as time goes on, people seem more interested in filling out a name on a family tree than engaging with the OCA and the memory of MGC men. Judith is critical of people who rediscover MGC ancestors, as she describes their interest as temporary and extractive. Rather than letting the numbers and interest dwindle further, the MGC/OCA would like to officially stop before that point comes, and their centenary brings them full circle. Judith and the OCA would like to have a plaque installed at a site of importance in honour of the MGC men.

The influence of MGC men that died in active service can be felt through the members that sought the MGC/OCA out to connect to and honour their wartime kin. Among the members, there might be some comfort in the knowledge that national remembrance will go on even as the MGC/OCA stops. Despite the nearing end of the MGC/OCA it is unlikely that remembrance stops for the current members. The MGC/OCA's practice puts remembrance centre stage, they are often commemorating kin, and they live in a country WWI is commemorated on a national level (see Crépon 2013). Crépon asks why we remember wars, and answers that memory as responsibility is about our past, present, and future attitude toward death (1). MGC/OCA's choice of an ending is conceptually significant, especially as it lines up with a significant date in a cyclical calendar, as Crépon suggests. This facilitates cohesion as a group but also cohesion with the larger national narrative of sacrifice and unity. The remembrance events, the way the OCA members engage with the memory of the dead—these things constitute care for the dead. The question in the context of the MGC/OCA then also becomes: when does remembrance and commemoration end?

In this chapter I have addressed the ending as armistice and commemoration for forging a 'we' from pastime loss, as the death of individuals and the way this influenced kin to approximate their life and death, as an apocalypse bound to return to us again and again, and as a conceptual tool to bring remembrance or peace activism to a satisfying close, so that a new chapter may begin. The following chapter will address neutrality and will consider my own positionality both in the field and as a reader of WWI literature.

Chapter II: Neutral Country

Dutch Neutrality

When people speak of 'the War' in the Netherlands, they will always be speaking of WWII. It became clear to me very quickly after moving from The Netherlands to Great Britain, that when people speak of 'the War' in the United Kingdom, they usually mean the *First* World War. Growing up in the Netherlands, WWI hardly played a role in my understanding of the history of Europe. The Second World War greatly overshadows WWI in education and the cultural memory of the country. As I was taught in secondary-school classrooms, we were a neutral country in WWI, and we tried to be neutral again in WWII, but we were invaded regardless. Only when I moved to the UK did I realise that Dutch neutrality did not merely keep the war at bay, but also hindered an understanding of what that war did and meant in Europe and for the empires that constituted Europe. That war was one of my final-year exam subjects (in 2008), but it was clustered together with several other conflicts under the heading '*European Wars 1789-1919*'. All I knew of WWI as a teenager was some poetry (which didn't interest me), and that the invention of the telegraph was important during that time. We were told to study the causes and the innovations that came with WWI, but not our own country's role in the war that raged just over the border and involved most of the countries around us. The 1930 film adaptation of *All Quiet* also made an appearance in history class, but it was old and bleak—not to mention in black and white—and this, too, failed to interest teenaged me. Only when I had to read the novel at university did the sad and brutal text with its odd directness and short sentences hold my attention.

During my fieldwork, I was often asked the question of how I came to be interested in WWI, seemingly twice removed from it as someone under thirty and as a Dutch person. Part of this surprise stems from the knowledge that the Dutch did not fight in WWI. Neutrality meant that the government sent no soldiers to the front and there were no battlefields in the country. Neighbouring Belgium did have its memorials and remembrance ceremonies, but that seemed only logical for the land on which so much of the war was fought. The limited knowledge fit the national narrative of a country of tradespeople. Even the details of our neutrality are not widely known or taught. In my family lore the Western Front was only present as the rumbling of bombardments over the border in the distance

while one of my great-aunts was giving birth. I have no kin who fought and died in the trenches and in the field, and my interlocutors saw this lack of link, specifically, as puzzling. Additionally, I am only half Dutch. One side of my family was still living under colonial rule in Suriname during WWI. This heritage inevitably comes up; I am mixed race and when I mention I am Dutch, people will nearly always comment on my not being very blue eyed, blonde, or tall. All considering, what could I possibly have to do with the Great War?

Most often the cultural reference points for WWI are specifically British or French or German—and occasionally American or form the Commonwealth. New and fresh angles of inquiry are emerging regarding WWI, especially from colonised lands such as New Zealand, Australia, India, and so on. While extremely valuable, these narratives provide different perspectives (whether in opposition to or support of the known narratives) from a point of vested interest: because they were involved—fighting—in this war. The neutral-but-close angle is distinct because it provides an analytical angle to address WWI narratives, as well as informing my own position and attitudes. In the wider genre of WWI literature there is no real Dutch presence. There is not a single Dutch WWI text which is readily available the way Remarque's or Blunden's are. Reading this literature when your country is present in the narratives as one of the fighting sides, and the people portrayed could have been your grandparents, is quite different from reading them when your country is not really represented in them. Preeta Nilesh (2017) observes this distance and the effect it had on the publication of war literature:

> Dutch literature of the period reflected the remoteness of war and looked at war either as a plot device or a vague, powerful monster that threatened human civilization. While the belligerent nations had front-line experiences to explore war, the Dutch counterparts relied on translations provided by publishers. (913)

This echoes the experience of Dutch schoolchildren who are, in spite of their geographical proximity, not presented with Dutch war narratives but with those from the belligerent countries. Dutch books from a hundred years ago are hard to come by, and the language from that time looks decidedly archaic to contemporary readers, limiting the chances that students might find narratives with such a 'vague monster' rather than a war at its heart (ibid). There is also an explicit mention of the lack of WWI literature in Dutch; As is pointed

out in *Levende Talen Magazine* ('*Living Languages Magazine'*): 'The First world war barely received a place in Dutch literature' (Moerman 14; translation my own). What, then, did this Dutch neutrality entail? And what does this mean for the understanding one can have of the (potential) politics of one's country when it comes to warfare?

The Dutch policy of neutrality started with the short-lived union with Belgium breaking up in 1830. WWI started over eighty years later and was formally not enough of a reason to get involved, even if it took place on former Dutch territory. In the years before WWI the Netherlands had worked hard to present the country internationally as reliably neutral. This is when the catchphrase "Friendship with all, alliances with none" came to be 'the nation's neutrality creed, and the Dutch studiously avoided choosing sides in any conflict involving European powers' (Kruizinga, Moeyes and Klinkert 2014: n.p.).[15] As Kruizinga et al explain, the fact that the Dutch were asked to host the Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 meant international recognition of the country's neutral status (ibid). A status that was further solidified when The Hague became the seat for the new Permanent Court of Arbitration, and subsequently with the building of the Peace Palace, which opened in 1913, not long before WWI broke out. The details of this are not passed on through education in the Netherlands, with the weight of classes on the history of the 20th century being placed squarely on WWII.

At the dawn of WWI, the Dutch presented themselves as a 'saturated state': a state content with their territory—its empire—and as committed to preserving and protecting the existing balance of power (Kruizinga et al. 2014: n.p.). In brief: Dutch neutrality during WWI was a practical and political concern for a small nation with large overseas colonies. The Dutch stood a lot to lose from international conflict. It is an attitude towards war that came after the Napoleonic wars in which the Dutch had lost considerable amounts of colonised land (such as present-day Sri Lanka and South Africa). War brought the potential threat of losing colonies in present-day Indonesia or the Caribbean, places which were of great significance to the Dutch empire. The 'political, independent, and armed neutrality' the Dutch enacted involved a military that was to protect the borders from soldiers of either side entering it, without sending them to fight in active combat and putting too much at

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[15] This included the Boer War, in which the British fought descendants of Dutch colonisers, but the Netherlands refrained from getting involved.

stake by getting involved (Kruizinga et al. n.p.). The Dutch military was sent to point out and guard the border. When the German army marched passed the southern border (into Belgium), no moves were made to stop them as long as the soldiers did not cross the German-Dutch border. The Netherlands had a large army to protect their neutrality—and border—and to manage the many refugees that came into the country (see De Roodt 2000).

Theoretically, foreign soldiers could cross the Dutch border by accident, but a hint as to why soldiers of the warring countries might enter the Netherlands is given in Remarque's *All Quiet*. One of the characters, Detering, suddenly starts to act 'suspicious' and his comrades hear him pack in the night. Baumer, the protagonist, notes this behaviour as well, and:

> So I stayed awake. Nothing happened; in the morning he was as usual. Apparently he had noticed that I had been watching him;—but the second morning he was gone. I noticed it, but said nothing, in order to give him time; he might perhaps get through. Various fellows have already got into Holland. (Remarque 1970: 233)

As a neutral country, deserters would try to enter the Netherlands, where they would be taken as Prisoners of War (POW). Although this meant one might spend an indefinite amount of time interred, they would no longer have to fight at the front. Soldiers that entered the Netherlands either accidentally or intentionally included pilots whose planes crashed across the borders. The Dutch could not send any of these soldiers back as that would be to aid the warring countries.[16] All warring countries upheld the death penalty for desertion at the time, and thus deserting to the Netherlands—so temptingly close to Belgium, sharing a border—came at a considerable risk. In *All Quiet,* the soldiers receive the news that Detering was apprehended by the military police – he did not start towards Holland but towards Germany, and his consequent fate as a deserter is heavily implied:

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[16] Of these soldiers, the Belgians far outnumbered those of all other nations; 33,105 POWs in the Netherlands were Belgian, 1,751 were British, 1,461 were German, eight French, and four American (De Roodt 2000: 139–40).

A week after we heard that he had been caught by the field gendarmes, those despicable military police. He had headed toward Germany, that was hopeless, of course—and, of course, he did everything else just as idiotically. Anyone might have known that his flight was only homesickness and a momentary aberration. But what does a court-martial a hundred miles behind the front-line know about it? We have heard nothing more of Detering. (Remarque 1970: 233-4)

The role of the gendarmes in the eyes of the soldiers is immediately clear, and they seem to be seen almost as traitors—more so than the deserter they apprehended. There is another division drawn between the soldiers and other parts of the military; the 'court-martial a hundred miles behind the front-line' who did not partake in the front-line life Detering was escaping. To be shot at dawn for desertion is the military punishment someone like Detering would have received if he was caught before reaching the Dutch border. But other hurdles lay ahead; at the end of 1916 the German forces finished installing a barbed and lethal electrical fence spanning over two hundred kilometres and separating the Belgian-Dutch border. The fence was aptly nicknamed '*de dodendraad*' ('wire of death') by the Dutch (fig. 9). Whichever of the real-life wartime dangers made it into the literary backstory of this character, Detering is separated from his comrades for his actions.

Fig. 9. Postcard featuring *de dodendraad*

The neutral Netherlands was separated from the Western theatre of war by their neutral policy, military punishment, and the death wire. While these facts were hardly present in my Dutch schooling, and I had certainly never heard of the *dodendraad* before, there are Dutch-language initiatives that aim to further address WWI and supplement formal education. SEW or *Studiecentrum Eerste Wereldoorlog* ('Study centre WWI') is one such collective. Their website describes they aim to 'increase the awareness of WWI among a wider audience', particularly among secondary schoolchildren (n.p., translation my own). SEW has the conviction 'that knowledge of WWI can help young people to better interpret and develop nuanced opinions on current political-military affairs' (ibid, translation my own). Additionally, SEW explicitly mentions it is their goal to deepen their knowledge of WWI 'from a neutral perspective' by bringing together 'research professionals' and 'interested non-professionals' and focuses on higher education through publications, lectures, and excursions (ibid, translation my own). A third node, which is echoed by the educational journal *Didactief*, is the idea of a moral education: 'WWI was a catalyst for thinking about education goals. The war showed the low moral standard in Europe, educators had to impart a better moral consciousness on the new generation: the inclination towards peace as educational goal' (Stolk n.p., translation my own). This linking to morality is interesting, particularly as it goes largely unexplained, and because it has two main implications. One, that if Europe's people had been more morally equipped, war would not have happened. And two, that merely by knowing the past, and specifically what happened in WWI, we might become morally better—and potentially avoid war. Moreover, would that suggest the Dutch could view themselves as morally superior, as evidenced by their choice to remain neutral? The (geo)political and trade considerations that must have concluded in the Dutch policy of neutrality cannot be ignored. The framing of war as a moral failing provokes more questions than it answers, and it is a framing in which other types of systemic violence, such as the colonies and their role in the all-important trade, are downplayed.

What does it mean to be a neutral country? The question has shown to be deceptively simple, as the political situation of the country and the world at large have everything to do with what neutrality looks like for a nation. Neutrality does not equal pacifism, nor does it need to be decided on moral grounds. For example, Swiss neutrality is an armed neutrality, and they are involved in peacekeeping missions abroad. Likewise,

Dutch neutrality in WWI still allowed for trade with both Germany and the UK.[17] Carlo Moos (2017) states that Dutch neutrality in WWI was a military neutrality. As he explains: 'Military neutrality is the classic form of neutrality, […] and means taking no part in the wars of other states, treating all warring sides equally, and not placing one's territory at the disposal of any of the belligerents' (Moos n.p.). Moos further points out that although the rights and duties of the neutral country are stipulated according to Article 15 of the 1907 Fifth Hague Convention, the warring countries' responses to the neutral countries are not (ibid). Only 'deliberate attacks' on citizens and property of neutral states are considered war crimes (ibid).

For me personally, as a reader and ethnographer who can lay claim to such neutrality—by heritage and childhood (lack of) interest, what effect does this have on my reading of WWI literature? What does that Dutch neutral positioning enable in terms of critical reading across enemy lines? The answer lies in that very neutral perspective. When reading the novels of the corpus, underlying assumptions about who was to blame for any aspect of WWI do not feature. There is no nationalistic standpoint from which to survey 'the others'. Every one of the belligerent countries is in that sense 'other' to my national perspective. Rather, I am very conscious of the fashioning of soldiers and entire armies as victims rather than aggressors—the focus is so much on individual suffering in these narratives, that it seems to belie the fact that those killing them and their friends, were in turn being killed by them. Dutch education, typically stressing the chaos and randomness of the start, continuation, and end of the war, finds itself mirrored in these WWI texts where no one seems particularly better or worse than anyone they are fighting. It seems that, since I have no ancestral ties to any of the parties, I do not have to practice achieving neutrality in my critical reading while this must necessarily be part of the experience for critics from the war nations. I will reflect on this positionality later in the chapter. In the section that follows, I will engage with one specific peace campaign which involves navigating neutrality.

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[17] This was extremely advantageous to the Dutch economy while large swatches of the world were at war. As Nilesh explains: 'The Dutch economy showed a real per capital growth of 2.4 percent between 1913 & 1921' (916).

Campaigning for Neutrality

The Friends House I am headed towards is an imposing building located in central London. It is rectangular and looks somewhat squat, while the windows are stacked four floors high, and white columns flank the entrance. This is where the Veterans for Peace (VFP) annual conference takes place today. My initial thoughts about the price for renting space in such a prime real estate location are dispelled before the end of the day, when I am told that the Quakers let peace organisations use the rooms at little to no cost. This introduction to VFP came through Maya; my previous attempts to reach both VFP UK and VFP US by myself had proved difficult, but though her introduction I was invited to be present at the UK branch's annual conference. VFP is a peace organisation founded by and specifically for former service members.[18] The organisation is voluntary, and you need to be an ex-service member to join. Originally founded in the US, membership of the UK chapter is not limited to the British military. VFP UK uses the UK government definition of a veteran, which is as follows: 'Everyone who has performed military service for at least one day and drawn a day's pay is termed a veteran'.[19] VFP is politically not affiliated with any political party, and I have met members that have served in wars ranging from WWII to Palestine and Afghanistan. The message that appears to be most important to VFP, and that they carry out most and physically by having it put on the back of their handbook and their blue sweaters is the aforementioned 'War is not the solution to the problems we face in the 21st century' (fig. 10).

Fig. 10. VFP handbook 2019

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[18] VFP was founded in the US in 1985, the UK chapter was founded in London in 2011.
[19] From the 2019 edition of the *Veterans for Peace Handbook*.

A conclusion they reached 'as a result of our collective experiences' (*Handbook* 2019: n.p.). Their 'priority campaign' in 2019 was the 'Neutral Country' campaign. Dutch neutrality showed how neutrality was upheld and where it was lost, but how might neutrality be gained?

Considering the example of Dutch Neutrality and its reverberations which can be felt in WWI literature, it begs the question: should neutrality be understood as a useful and necessary fiction before it is implemented? None of belligerent countries of WWI have since become neutral, and to aim for a new neutrality would necessarily involve having to imagine what that neutrality would look like. Of what policies would need to be expanded and rolled back. Such imagining appears to be an integral part of the peace activism I have witnessed from both VFP and VCNV. People protest ongoing wars, but also policy and governmental actions which might lead to future war, death, and suffering. Many apocalypses and utopias can be (and are) imagined in the endeavour to construct a different future. The Neutral Country campaign is one example where the imagining of neutrality motivates activism.

The Neutral Country campaign was one of VFP's most prominent campaigns before they closed in August 2022.[20] It launched officially in 2021 but it already featured in their handbook when I attended their conference in 2019.[21] As the *Handbook* states: 'We work to influence the foreign and defence policy of the UK, for the larger purpose of world peace' (2019: n.p.). At the annual conference VFP sold Neutral Country pins of the campaign logo: a red 'N' with a dark blue circle around it (fig. 11).

Fig. 11. Neutral Country campaign logo

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[20] This closure occurred after my data collection, and therefore fell outside of the scope of this thesis, which is why the VFP UK campaign ending it is not included in Chapter I. Their closing statement can be read on the landing page of vfpuk.org.

[21] Source (neutralcountry.uk) now archived.

The objective of the campaign is to make the UK a permanently neutral country. The strategy outline is brief: 1) to campaign for democratic control of defence policy and 2) to campaign for a referendum on neutrality (*Handbook* n.p.). The steps to achieve this are more detailed, but what they hope to gain is the following:

1. Protect the territory of the UK.
2. Develop an Independent Defence Policy.
3. Expel foreign military personnel from the UK.
4. Withdraw from treaties that would involve us in a future war.
5. Not attack other countries or enter into wars between them. (ibid)

The initial concerns are isolating the country, protecting the land from invasion and the presence of foreign military, and to curb the influence of other countries, treaties, or wars so that the UK might refrain from war altogether. As with other aspects of their activism, VFP intends to use their 'authority as veterans', as one of the speakers put it during the conference, to accomplish these goals while simultaneously tackling other issues, such as the age at which new recruits are allowed to be targeted. The benefits of Neutrality are listed as such:

Benefits of neutrality:

Monetary—we will save billions that can be spent on other priorities.

Reputation / Status—we will work to become an honest broker to help other countries overcome their differences through discussion and not war.

Defining a new role for a post Brexit UK. (ibid)

VFP articulates a perspective on political agency which is based on trust through the experience of the VFP members. Becoming a neutral country is geared towards a national defence policy that is defensive (rather than aggressive): 'Our armed forces are trained and equipped to attack other countries across the globe. They are not focused on defending our country' (ibid). This is imbued with the voice of experience and of this current policy they conclude: 'This is not a defence policy. This is a war policy that has poorly served us and the world in the 21st Century' (ibid). In diplomatic and foreign policy settings, the notion of an

'honest broker' the VFP appeals to, aims to be impartial; the implication here is that a neutral UK would be better equipped for that position as a party that does not have (military) self-interest at play. VFP proposes an armed neutrality not dissimilar to that of the Dutch during WWI. During the war Dutch troops were mobilised within the country's borders, but they never saw combat in the traditional sense. To be 'allies with all, friends with none' means exactly this distance from international agreements that might result in a war away from one's own territory. However, geographic and trading positions for the UK are very different from those in the Netherlands in 1916, and the political playing field is vastly different post-WWI and WWII.

During the conference VFP members expressed the desire to 'take the narrative back' and create a space for veterans 'where they can talk about how their lives have been used'. The political has become personal for them, while such experiences separate them from nonveteran civilians who have no such experiences. This notion is one which finds voice in feminist and decolonial critical readings as well, where the re-reading and reinterpretation of the WWI canon is vital. This also bears a connection to the veteran- and soldier-writers of WWI. Barbusse published during the war, but most other authors returned to their memories (and old diaries) years later, reflecting on their experiences, feelings, and opinions now that they were no longer bound by the constraints of the military (most of the authors were volunteers or conscripted, rather than professional) and an all-encompassing war. VFP members appeal to their own experiences of warfare and, more broadly, of being in the military, in their peace activism. As veterans they have and command a certain authority and credibility, when speaking of the wars and conditions they are protesting. It also seems they command respect due to combat experience which others (nonveteran civilians) have no access to, giving the perception they have a better sense of what they are talking about than those who have never been to war and protest it. While in the military it is not possible to say these things in favour alternative policy. This is true not only from the point of view that they would be protesting their own actions—and arguably the most 'straightforward' thing to do in that case is to cease your own actions—but the military requires the following of orders. There is no such thing as a 'strike' in military context, only a refusal to follow orders or even desertion, which will result in imprisonment and a trial. There are VFP members who have had 'gag orders' put on them by the British

Military after leaving, and so those people remain unable to speak out about certain things.[22] The VFP comes up against such limits, but they test them where able.

Here, there is a connection to be made with Jacques Rancière's (1999) understanding of 'politics,' as an activity that takes equality as its main principle (ix). This is the case even, or especially, if that equality is something for which there is a struggle. Ayten Gündoğdu (2017) argues that Rancière's conceptualisation of politics should be viewed 'in terms of the struggles of disenfranchised or marginalized [*sic*] groups who demonstrate their equality by exercising the very capacities they supposedly lack and by enacting the rights they are not entitled to claim' (189). Rancière's politics are thus comprised of the 'disruptive practices of demonstrating one's equality against all odds' (ibid). To act as though one is equal when the structures in place forbid you to (disobeying an order or speaking about something classified, for example), is to act politically. In that context, following Rancière, challenging who is allowed to speak about what, and the way in which they are allowed to speak, is the only thing which would be considered 'politics' because it has the potential to disrupt the existing framework within which various actors speak (see Rancière 1992; 1999). I argue that it is this type of politics that VFP adopts. One in which the members claim a right to the things specifically denied them by the military they were once part of. These are such as: freedom of speech, freedom of movement, to disobey orders, freedom to make their own moral judgment or to disagree with the judgement of one's superiors.

Neutrality, however, does not automatically equal an absence of interest in the workings of the geopolitical field, and one can wonder if the solutions that would be proposed might not benefit the country in other ways (through trade deals for example). Trading food, medicine or even arms might still be among the options for a neutral UK, as maintaining trade relations with warring countries was the prerogative of the neutral Netherlands during WWI. In terms of serving military, the campaign suggests it would result in less loss of life as the British military would not be sent or stationed overseas during conflicts; they would be out of harm's way and unable to harm others directly. What a British neutrality might look like and how it might be achieved are complex questions, and the image that is drawn by VFP of a truly independent military that does not get dragged

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[22] A gag order is a directive or legal order forbidding the disclosure of particular information.

into wars due to pacts with other countries (such as NATO) echoes the individual ethical stance that anthropologist Tobias Kelly (2020) identifies when it comes to conscientious objection. Kelly explains that in WWI Britain, the issue of exemption from military service became one of 'recognizing individual ethical convictions' (2020: 323). No official definition of 'conscience' was codified, creating a form of conscience that had no defined social or cultural content—it was secular (ibid: 323-4). This sense of conscience is at play with VFP and other peace activists too, Kelly summarises: 'Conscience emerged in the gap between personal hopes, fears, and aspirations, and the perceived demands of living with other people' (2018: 17).

Dutch neutrality has shown that self-interest can be a motivator that trumps morality and the details of a country's neutrality can be infinitely more complex than they might seem. For the Dutch this was certainly not an ethical consideration, and their concerns seem to have been primarily financial, fuelled by colonial interest and the desire to maintain the status quo. By not getting involved they were able to trade with both the Germans and the British and to retain a hold on their colonies, and there are damning examples of food being sold to the belligerent countries while people in the Netherlands went hungry.[23] As VFP documents: 'We maintain military bases in 14 countries and have military personnel deployed in over 80 countries around the world'.[24] Additionally, Dutch and VFP's neutrality show that neutrality is policed. VFP encounters this in their campaign—and effectively offers itself as its guardsman ('honest broker'). The role of the police, versus yet entangled with the role of politics, is a complicated one, particularly so when it involves a monopoly on violence, or the right to use force among 'your own'. The fate of the character of Detering in *All Quiet* illustrates this. Apprehended by the military police, his fate is sealed, and the police is the force who guards and controls the parameters that are set up by military law.

From my perspective, the UK as a neutral country seemed very idealised initially, especially as the UK was still at war in Afghanistan at the time, and both stopping and rolling back the reach of present policy seemed near-impossible. However, in the way that my

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[23] Despite national shortages, food would still be exported to the belligerent countries. In 1917 this sparked the *aardappeloproer* ('potato riots'), when people protested food shortages and in at least one instance plundered a potato shipment that was meant for export.
[24] Source (neutralcountry.uk) now archived.

interlocutors have conceptualised (political) change since that first introduction to fieldwork among peace activists and the idea of UK neutrality, they have placed considerable energy and action into such essentially 'fictional' or 'hopeful' plans. Imagining an alternative to the given present is an essential part of the peace activism that I have encountered. Pushing the notion of a necessary fiction I wanted to consider neutrality as an adopted attitude and consider this in my critical reading and in the field. As indicated previously, positionality played a significant part in the field, and it must be further addressed as a foundational—yet disruptive—element of the 'Dutch neutrality'.

Neutrality: A Fiction

Neutrality, or the choice and ability of staying neutral and objective in matters of research became explicitly relevant in my interactions with my interlocutors. Neutrality implies a certain safety alongside the political stance, as though it puts one out of the range of potential detrimental consequences. Considering neutrality as a personal stance (rather than a nation's), showed its uses and limits when it intersected with my diasporic positionality in the field. As mentioned, there are ways in which I share the privilege of my interlocutors, and ways in which I do not. Being drawn into sets of relations through fieldwork brings the focus to the gaps between my interlocutors' and my own experiences and beliefs. Dutch Neutrality is no longer a political reality, but I aimed to adopt this 'Dutch neutral stance' creatively, exploring the distance to one's subject and oneself that can be created through this stance. Allowing my positionality to take on this momentary 'neutral Dutch' perspective in relation to the corpus and my participant observation. What might it mean, if anything, to consider my stance a neutral one? The boundaries of this stance came forward especially in relation to the political stance of my interlocutors, and the way they make this stance known: through protest.

In his reflections on auto-ethnography in the volume *Engaged Anthropology* (2016), Shahram Khosravi explains the research and writing style as one where the personal is interjected into ethnographic writing. Because it is a form of self-narrative, Khosravi argues, auto-ethnography has the potential to place the self in wider social context and instead of focussing on solely one's own subjectivity or a supposedly objective stance, what emerges in the space in between those two modes becomes relevant (2016: 54). Here, with the focus

on this in-between, Khosravi turns to philosopher Jacques Rancière. For Rancière, 'the gap' (*écart*) is where he identifies the place of politics (1992: 60-2; Khosravi 2016: 54). He states that the political subject is placed in such an interval or gap, whatever being-together there is, is constituted by this gap, a being in between—between names, identities, cultures, etc. (Khosravi 54). It is the subject itself which 'is an outsider or, more, an *in-between*' (Rancière 1992: 61, original emphasis). 'Political subjectivization', the acting-out equality or wrongdoing by people who are together in the sense that they fall in the same in-between, together (ibid), always involves an impossible identification. An identification which cannot be embodied by the one that utters it. As he demonstrates with the example of the Paris Massacre of 1961 (during the Algerian War for independence):

> [...] for my generation politics in France relied on an impossible identification—an identification with the bodies of the Algerians beaten to death and thrown into the Seine by the French police, in the name of the French people, in October 1961. We could not identify with those Algerians, but we *could* question our identification with the "French people" in whose name they had been murdered. That is to say, we could act as political subjects in the interval or the gap between two identities, neither of which we could assume. (Rancière 1992: 62, original emphasis)

In this view, these categories do not exist a priori. Therefore, a subject does not belong to certain categories from the outset, and it is only identified with them in the subject's political struggles for equality (Gündoğdu 2017: 190). The position of marginalised groups, who in effect have been identified by someone else—like the Algerians in Rancière's personal example or Khosravi's own story, complicates this malleability as they are the ones under attack.

This pinpoints where Rancière distinguishes between the police and politics: the police's function is to maintain the categories to which individuals are assigned (from outside); politics is the possibility to disrupt those categories (see: Rancière 1999; Gündoğdu 2017). The encounter with Rancière's political and that of his police is what causes dissensus, and it is the act of policing, rather than a literal police force, which wields influence in this constellation. Politics in this sense are able to defy essentialist categorisation. However, where it concerns my fieldwork, physical police force cannot be

ignored, especially where it concerns protest that is involved in being political (i.e., challenging Rancière's police). Gündoğdu takes up Rancière's category of 'police' and argues it is undertheorised. When speaking of police, Rancière reformulates it from the unit responsible for maintaining law and order, to denoting 'the allocation of roles, positions, places, and functions in a social order on the basis of a set of assumptions about the competencies and qualifications of individuals and groups' (in Gündoğdu 193-4). The place Rancière reserves for the police force is minor, calling it 'the petty police' and 'the truncheon blows of the forces of law and order' (Rancière 1999, 28). Because police force is not given a place in his analysis of police(ing), this belies the very real violence of the police forces. In terms of positionality, this is theorised by someone who is not, nor has ever been, at risk the way certain (racialised, gendered, etc.) groups in society have been. Algerians in France might have been murdered 'in his name', but Rancière was never at risk the way they were, a fact he only acknowledges in the sense of 'identification'. Rancière's theorisation ignores two things: the actual police force, which uses violent force upon its subjects, and entrenched inequalities, which exposes some groups 'to various forms of lawlessness and arbitrary [police] violence, effectively strip[ping] them of the rights and protections associated with citizenship' (Gündoğdu 2017: 212). Gündoğdu continues: 'Given this entanglement of politics with police, struggles for equality demand shifting our gaze from "exceptional and vanishing moments of uprising" to the conditions that continuously shape, and at times undermine, the possibilities of verifying equality' (2017: 217-8). In brief, the reality of police violence stops some of us from acting as though the state does not exist, because it kills us in response. The massacre Rancière takes as his point of departure was the police response to a demonstration by Algerians.

Khosravi explores how his own research and the way his positionality as both an academic in Sweden and that as a migrant who has been the victim of racialised violence in that country intersect and inform each other. He posits that as a research method, auto-ethnography offers a writing genre that allows one to explore this added layer of 'between-ness' where he sees a chance to link and integrate his stories into the experiences of his readers (Khosravi 54-5). In this, his engagement is academic, political, and emotional. It is at the intersection of these three nodes that my engagement with the peace activists takes place. In the writing up of my findings, auto-ethnography offers an alternative genre which allows one to take a critical stance when it comes to the dominant modes of producing

knowledge (Khosravi 56; see Sunder Rajan 2021). These dominant modes roughly follow a structure of the division between 'North/theory and South/field' (Khosravi 56), which need to be challenged on a structural level. Khosravi's level of engagement beyond that of an academic is to do with his positionality, his past, the way others read his body and the violence inflicted on him because of this reading. This is different from what Graeber describes in his ethnography *Direct Action*: 'As the reader may have noticed, I am making no pretence of objectivity here. I did not become involved in this movement in order to write an ethnography. I became involved as a participant' (2009: 12). Graeber's wording implies that he finds objectivity a pretence, but his explication of his anarchist past and current life, is relevant to his engagement with the field. Rather than coming from theory (top) to the field (down), his political convictions are already tied up in the research. He comes to the field with lived experience (although to a lesser extent than his interlocutors), influencing the traditional top-down power dynamic. Khosravi's case is somewhat different. Khosravi's participation in what would become his research field (working with migrants and refugees) is not a political choice in the same manner, but it is something that allows him to connect with his interlocutors. For Khosravi, his own experiences brought him closer to his interlocutors because they overlapped to such an extent that 'the dividing line between the ethnographer and his interlocutors and others became blurred' (2016: 55). In my fieldwork no such overlap existed, but in the gaps created by the difference between my interlocutors and me, certain things came into focus. I was not so far removed from the reality of my US interlocutors as someone from one of the war zones they protest (such as Afghanistan or Iraq), but this 'political subjectivization' came up often during my fieldwork. My interlocutors felt distinctly that when a government wages war, it does so in the name of its citizens. Particularly interlocutors in the US were acutely aware that wars in the Middle East were being fought in their name. They vocally protested US warfare in those terms, sometimes carrying signs: '*Not in our name!*' The feeling that a government acts as the representative of their people came up against this fundamental hurdle, thus giving them cause for resistance.

My participant observation knew limits due to police presence and immigration legislation but beyond these practicalities, in the US or the UK it was not a government acting in *my* name. The potential consequences for me in the US were different: as a non-citizen arrest leads to deportation and refused re-entry for a decade. The UK has no such

policy for European citizens, and while I upheld the same limits to my participant observation, being present but not holding signs or chanting/singing, the gap between my interlocutors and myself was smaller than it was in the US. I was aware of my own positionality within the different activist groups, but I had not thought in terms of my own politics. Rather, my attention was focussed on actions—how far is someone able and willing to go in protest of something? I expected to (privately) have an opinion on the actions of my interlocutors at the protests I was to attend but had not considered that joining them at these protests would influence my opinion of the politics they were protesting. I had a rough sense that wars were bad because people died in them, while also being aware that the Netherlands was liberated by other countries' involvement in WWII. Politically, I kept my distance because war did not seem something which could be influenced through voting or protest. All in all, I had a sense of not wanting to judge those who joined the military or went to war, and supported their cause, but without a sense that any of this could truly be stopped or questioned. My interlocutors were questioning their government and directly addressing it through protest in the public space. How the peace protestors (which the name (and practice) would suggest intended no harm) were met by the police force of their own governments was disillusioning. Apart from the police's stern refusal to interact with any of the reasons they were protesting—citing either 'doing their job' or 'only eating, sleeping, and working without getting involved with politics' in one case—they were actively arresting people whose prime objective was to stop harm from coming onto other humans. Precisely because I did not fully identify with the protestors but was faced with the police who might see me as such because I was among the protesters (which is known to happen to bystanders, see Graeber 2009), this 'gap' existed where I was aligned with the protestors in their reasoning and risk without taking activist action beyond physically being present.

I also fell into another 'gap'. One of the ways this gap played out is in how my interlocutors knew themselves safe to get arrested, while this was far from the case for me, and not just because I was a foreign national. Most of my interlocutors across the VFP, VCNV, and WAT are white, while I am not (Maya of VCNV UK is the only exception). As mentioned in the Introduction, this caused me necessary anxiety in the US due to racialised police violence. This discomfort was not dispelled after leaving the US, rather it increased, despite my physical distance from the country. At the protests I attended in Washington DC, it was made clear that protesting at the capitol is legal, while standing on the steps of the

capitol and not leaving them when asked to will lead to arrest. The White House allowed protesters to stand on the lawn opposite, but far away and there was extra police present, as Trump was spending millions on having a higher fence installed and operations were being guarded. This was 2019, a few months before the murder of George Floyd and the reinvigoration and spread of the Black Lives Matter protests (started in 2014).[25] Within two months I would be back in the Netherlands, locked down in a hotel, watching the news and seeing Black Americans being violently attacked by police for protesting on the same lawn in front of the White House that I had been occupying less than a month before.[26]

The gap was constituted by the movement between my interlocutors and the police, the police and myself, larger systemic rules and risks at play (making arrest low risk for my interlocutors and riskier for me) and my interlocutors' own racial biases. Theoretically being the researcher might put one in a situation of influence over one's interlocutors (as is the case in more colonial settings). I was a mixed-race woman in a very white space, where most people were older, and the racial dynamics that would play out in some cases showed a difference that could not be bridged, turning these presuppositions on its head. It put me in an interesting position where I had feared police violence (and rightly so), but none of the protests I was at escalated and the racist incidents took place among peace activists.

The question of neutrality or objectivity in the face of the politics of my interlocutors thus became more complex than I had anticipated. While sometimes the protestors see police as agents of the state and so collaborators in war(s), at other times they would view them as something more neutral, individuals stuck in between who need to make a living and have a job to do. The in-betweenness and 'neutral stance' that the police are claiming to adopt while actively enforcing the law, show that neutrality is not a fixed position but one which is dependent on perspective. From whose position are we looking? Or rather, from whose position am I looking? Despite my concerns when it came to the police, I had not expected the frustrated emotional response police presence at protests evoked in me, or the distaste I came to feel for the way the police conducted themselves. Beyond the politically correct, ultimately indifferent verbal responses, protestors in both the US and UK

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[25] Black Lives Matter draws attention to the fact that Black people can effectively be killed without consequences (that they are, in effect, not considered grievable (Butler 2009), see Chapter III).

[26] I have found different ways of working through these experiences creatively, resulting in the piece 'Choose Your Own Protest' in the artist book *jaune, geel, gelb, yellow. Monochrome*, by Antonis Pittas (see Appendix L).

were met with violence or the threat of violence—even if they were not arrested. Most of the activists did not seem to think badly of the police, although there is a lot of distrust. Most protesters also seem to be aware that police people have certain jobs (and thus livelihoods) that they must answer to—although there does seem to be a hope among some that the police can be educated to the point of joining the protesters or leaving the police force. There was no identification with the police, whose professional capacity shielded them from real interaction with the protestors beyond asking them to desist before moving to making arrests. The force and (fire)arms police are allowed to use shift this perspective as well. Police action can—and will—escalate from mere presence, blocking entry, to arresting and detaining people. And the inherent threat can be felt to be much greater than that. As protests in countries ranging from the US to Iran have shown: if the police are told to shoot, they will open fire. In this sense they are bound to their orders the way people in the military are and the emphasis on them 'just doing their job' is one with potentially far-reaching (political, lethal) consequences.

Veterans take up a different space than civilian peace activists, and lay claim to a different identification, because of their war experience. Even at marches and protests, this clearly commands respect rather than dismissal. During one protest I overheard someone behind the fences asking someone after the service who they were and what they were doing, and they were very impressed with the fact that they had served. This brings us back to the role of veteran-authored novels and memoirs and the authority that veteran writers and activists are perceived to hold. Of course, not all veteran writers were (or are) activists. Specifically, where it concerns my corpus, most of the authors did not make a vocal claim for any particular party, for example, even if their work has come to be associated with certain ideologies. If we consider both the texts and the authors as actors, how can we articulate war literature and neutrality?

Political Reception, Political Stances

On one occasion in the crisp Illinois winter, I take a trip with Kathy and her partner Bob. They take me to the First Division Museum at Cantigny, which they had been wanting to visit for

some time.[27] When we were walking down the path after we exited the museum, Kathy started telling me how she was in Baghdad, Iraq, when the Shock and Awe bombings commenced in 2003. It was a more contentious account than what she had just shared with the people inside. Earlier in the museum we noticed that they had used some of Vera Brittain's writing from the time she was a VAD nurse in the exhibition. Because of Kathy's interest in Brittain's work and experiences she got talking to one of the volunteers. Kathy told him about her experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. She left out that she was in Baghdad while the US was bombing them but told him that she was not a veteran—although: 'I have been there often to bring medicine and things like that'. She seemed to tactfully avoid the words 'breaking sanctions' and focussed instead on medicine and helping people. She told the volunteer she had been to Iraq about twenty-seven and to Afghanistan over thirty times, and he ended up interrupting her, saying: 'You *are* a veteran'.

Veteranhood is a deceptively straightforward category. As mentioned, VFP UK uses the definition as upheld by the UK Government. However, ideas on the 'truth' of war (see Introduction), and the question of who has true war experiences complicates the notion. Momentarily stepping away from the government-sanctioned parameters, many in WWI can be said to have experienced war—from the soldiers to the civilians and the frontline nurses. If the focus is indeed on the experience of war (see McLoughlin 2011; Walsh 2009), a soldier's experience might end within days, as an immediate casualty or after illness, or after four long years. Narratives such as Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929) or Helen Zenna Smith's *Not So Quiet… Stepdaughters of War* (1930), show nurses being confronted with bombings, evacuations, and the casualties who suffered illness, amputations, and death.[28] It was their job to set to 'the dreadful task of mopping up after each battle' (Kaplan 2014: 37). The VAD was part of the British Red Cross, and under the rules of the Red Cross, which was established in 1864 under the foundational principles of 'humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality' (*The Fundamental* Principles 2015: n.p.). Hospitals such as the ones Brittain was stationed at (the 24th General, at Etaples), were to be neutral in the care they delivered:

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[27] The museum at Cantigny, Illinois, is dedicated to the First Battalion, also known as 'The Big Red One' and the battles they were present in, ranging from WWI to Iraq and Afghanistan.
[28] Helen Zenna Smith was the pen name of journalist Eva Grace Price, who wrote this (fictionalised) semi-biographical account, based on the diaries of the ambulance driver Winifred Young, who served behind the front lines in France during WWI (see Kaplan 2014).

every wounded is worthy of care. After the soldiers had recovered the Red Cross was no longer responsible for them. This is different from the neutral Netherlands; sending a soldier back his country would be to aid that (belligerent) country and so they were forced to remain as POW's. Brittain's experiences moved her to write *Testament* and as the memoir shows, she became politically active after WWI and was a great supporter of the League of Nations, which she felt was instrumental in preventing further war (Buck 2005: 107). I will return to this connecting point between Kathy and Brittain's peace activism in the Conclusion, and first want to draw out the parallels and differences in the way the novels of my corpus have been received and critiqued.

Brittain's *Testament* and Blunden's *Undertones* are both later British literary responses to WWI. Santiáñez (2016) groups both books in the same category: that of the war memoir. This is noteworthy because, as discussed in the Introduction, many critics still uphold a distinction that equates the truth of war to combat (narratives). Due to the societal limitations of the time this end up being a gendered division (see Campbell 1999). This, too, is a political move, and separates the valuable and truthful from the female and the margins. My encounter with the way neutrality is advocated and conceived of in my fieldwork helps to challenge this particular conception of how literary texts are political and politicised. Neither author was neutral at the time of the war, but later writing gives them a chance to reassess the experiences and even the politics at hand. When it comes to literature's extra-textual impact, McLoughlin references J. Hillis Miller and the 'necessary ethical moment in the act of reading' (in 2011: 190). It is a moment which provides an entry into other realms, such as the political realm, because it involves a response; an imperative which leads to action (McLoughlin 2011: 190). She continues: 'On an appropriately grand scale, the ethical moment might result in social and political action: protesting, voting, lobbying, consulting, decision-making' (ibid). In my fieldwork I have been on the lookout for the way this literature was engaged with, and while there were similarities within the groups, it was often an individual matter. While the veteran-authors interacted with other war literature, and my interlocutors in turn interacted with some of that WWI work, this connection to social and political action mentioned by McLoughlin did not become immediately apparent. Only through the lens of neutrality and my own stance as a critical reader did it occur to me that reading war literature is the very thing which has brought me from reading *All Quiet* (which I

could neither read as 'mine'/national nor 'enemy') to the political action described: altering my stances, protesting, decision-making and so on with activists during my fieldwork.

For women in WWI 'most of their participation occurred on the borders of battle' (Badenhausen 422). As is pointed out in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (1987), '[…] war must be understood as a gendering activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all members of a society, whether or not they are combatants' (Higonnet et al. 4). This gendering is evident in two kinds of war subjects that do get to the Netherlands in WWI: namely deserters (male combatants fleeing the battlefields) and refugees (often gendered as female: i.e., women and children fleeing warzones). War literature is often equated with combat narratives, and women's war literature (such as nurse narratives) are considered different things.[29] The same gendered problems that Brittain details coming across in service seem to have occurred as much for her memoir as for her person, even when critics do mention her. As mentioned in the Introduction, Fussell did not include her as a memoir writer in *The Great War and Modern Memory*. As pointed out by critics, 'In Fussell's text, women are noticeably absent and seemingly unimportant' (Badenhausen 2003: 421). To Badenhausen this is a slight towards a number of female WWI authors, and Brittain more specifically, while 'trench literature' has become synonymous with WWI literature. As Liane Schwarz emphasises: 'Europe, it seems, was determined to remember its Great War as almost exclusively masculine' (237). This is echoed by Palmer (2018), as he explains that the 'overwhelming focus on soldiers' experiences' meant that the female experience 'was relegated to the margins of what "war experience" meant' (50). This puts limitations on the text and its reading—even its reach and credibility. Badenhausen's analysis shows that the male and female war authors employed the same coping strategies in their writing, but this has been downplayed due to the way research has attempted to show and draw distinctions 'between the ways in which men and women confronted and processed the war' (2003: 422, following Raitt and Tate 1997). While this might be the case for criticism, *Testament* 'epitomizes the war memoir for many readers' (Buck 2005: 89). As Claire Buck puts it, 'As a survivor of the Great War Brittain believed herself, with others of the interwar years, responsible for preventing a future war' (2005: 107). The generation under scrutiny in

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[29] A distinction, one might add, that is hardly ever upheld for Ernest Hemingway and his experiences as an ambulance driver at the front.

Testament is society-wide, showing not only the men who fought, were injured, and died, but also the after-effects of their death and disappearance from life in this monumental war. Much like Judith's Ripple Effect (see Chapter I), the reverberations through families and society at large are felt in the text.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Blunden's *Undertones* is often considered canonical or even prototypical of the WWI canon. As Schneider and Potter emphasise however, Blunden's style is unique in its mix of the personal and the communal experiences at the front, the combination of memoir and poetry, and the 'rhetorically beautified language with the evocation of the horrors of war' (2021: 217). Blunden's text does not show a trajectory of development; rather we are presented with a narrator who is young and inexperienced, moving through the landscape of Flanders at war, and waiting or fighting in the trenches. Blunden reflects upon this himself in the text: 'a peculiar difficulty would exist for the artist to select the sights, faces, words, incidents, which characterized the time. The art is rather to collect them, in their original form of incoherence' (Blunden 1982: 182). Perhaps this relative incoherence explains why *Undertones* is not necessarily associated with any specific conviction or political movement. To me as a reader, these stylistic choices read as though he was primarily convinced of his own combination of victimhood and innocence, lingering there rather than with questions of guilt. This also means there are no heroic grand gestures or moments: everyday life during the war involves the men of a company and the fickleness of injury and death in the war-affected landscape. As Schneider and Potter put it, 'Blunden does what he needs to do mostly for the men in his company rather than for the country or the generals' (2021: 219).

Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* has had an unmistakable influence on the reading of WWI literature since its publication in 1975 and his reading of Blunden has proven similarly influential. Fussell's critical work devotes an entire chapter to Edmund Blunden, and the book even opens with a photograph of Blunden in uniform. Fussell teases out the main opposition or 'binary-vision' in *Undertones* (Schwarz 239; see Fussell 1975), and addresses how the narrative is structured on the pastoral elegy, where nature is opposed to war: a travesty of nature (261). Thomas Bowie Jr. (1993) extends the notion that Blunden's use of the pastoral does not only come from love for nature, but also from the 'radical otherness of the experience' of war (28). Bowie insists that Blunden's *Undertones* establishes a dialogue by directly inviting readers 'to join its world. It is a narrative that

insists upon a dynamic relation to the reality of the past it (re)presents' (Bowie 1993: 29). To Bowie, this means that the text allows us to 'recognize the reality of the experience he conveys—to touch its face and identify with it—and at the same time to admit the radical, haunted, evasive otherness of an ordeal that his narrative can only suggest but never capture' (ibid). Not only is there a back and forth between nature and war that disrupts it, but there is also a call on the reader to enter into dialogue and become privy to these 'truths' Blunden warns us he cannot guarantee unequivocally. This is true for us now as it was for his readership shortly after the war, and it gave the desired reply to the UK public at home who 'wanted to believe—that the only "truth" of war had emerged from the fighting young men in the trenches' (Schwarz 238). Focussed on trench experience, *Undertones* was written late enough to consider a generation which had not seen the war (Schneider and Potter 219; Edwards 18). In the writing of Blunden (as he himself is aware): 'Tone and persona are vital, for the process of approaching the truth of the war […] is itself the projection of a persona' – and a younger version of Blunden comes forward in the text (Edwards 18). This hints not merely at the narration of a past portion of life, but at the way that past version was unburdened with the experience of war. Through the WWI experience and his writing on it, Blunden (as well as Remarque) is part of the shift cultural historian Jay Winter (2017) identifies in the way we write about war in the west, which shifted from writing about warriors and put forth the notion that soldiers themselves could be victims of war (3). Politically, these canonical qualities in *Undertone* have a hint of neutrality to them, especially when compared to the (political) reception of other texts in my corpus, or the explicit political efforts Brittain partook in after WWI. The (political) reception of *Undertones*, *Storm of Steel*, and *Under Fire* followed a different trajectory.

Opposing the now-prevalent point of view that WWI soldiers were victims of WWI like most other people, stands Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel*. The account can be counted among the earlier waves of WWI literature, published shortly after the war. As pointed out, it is also one of the texts that changed most, as the author kept rewriting it throughout his long life. Andreas Huyssen points out that in criticism, *Storm of Steel* 'became a key text in the construction of […] the myth of the war experience and the central counterpoint to Remarque's anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*' (7-8). *Storm of Steel* is read as a vitalist text which, in spite of the horrors that are discussed, operates on the underlying thought that war made men. Jünger takes up an interesting space in the canon because

Storm of Steel cannot be identified as openly anti-war and lacks the pathos that has become associated with WWI texts. Quite to the contrary, his text is commonly read as largely positive about the war. Jünger belongs to the 'Conservative Revolution' (see Bendersky 2007; Hillard 2014; Wolin 1992; Woods 1996). Active during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), the thinkers in this movement idealized the values which were at the heart of 'the WWI battlefield experience: national struggle, danger, heroism, the spiritual purposes of violence, and the higher truth of pain' (Hillard 54; Bendersky 13-5). War was a positive, and combat experience even more so. Rather opposite to the experience of war as one of pointless tragedy, war was instead 'a heightened and purified form of life' for Jünger (Hutton 238). As Hutton demonstrates, Jünger does not address the moral questions about war that usually come to the fore—such as questioning war itself—but abandons them entirely, showing not nihilism but a morality which is obtained only through war (ibid).

It is positions such as these (which was patriotic if not nationalist (See: Hutton 2004)), which appealed to the Nazi party members. Jünger's political position has remained closely tied to his WWI writing, and he is often associated with Nazism as members of the party openly admired and appreciated him and his writing (see Neaman 1999; Nevin 1996). Jünger was never a member of the Nazi party and twice refused a seat in the Reichstag (in 1927 and 1933) when it was offered to him (Barr n.p.). Rather than attaching himself to political movements, Jünger seemed intent on formulating his own thoughts as a veteran writer and critic. The fact that *Storm of Steel* has a primarily positive attitude to war while maintaining key elements (such as the pain, loss, and gore), makes it an outlier in the canon. Its attitude towards warfare is vitalist, showing war as a circumstance which, yes, kills men, but also makes them. Rather than denouncing war, it is exalted in the narrative. Jünger's cannot be called the universal German perspective (after all, the much more popular and read *All Quiet* is German too), but it was considered the ideal perspective by the Nazi regime. The way the novel is read and interpreted now, however, carries much of the suspicion and discomfort (and distrust) which comes with Nazi popularity. The political weight of these texts is thus influenced, even altered, by the later reception, while other texts (such as *Undertones*) remain known primarily for their literary qualities and/or portrayal of the soldier as victim in WWI.

Storm of Steel is less emotional and quite distanced as a text. The narrative is fragmented and based on the diaries that Jünger kept during his active service in WWI. In it,

Jünger is quite analytical about the situation at the Western front, and only rarely seems to be truly affected by the exceptional circumstances he finds himself in. At the end of the narrative, when he is convalescing, Jünger starts counting the times he has been hit during his time at the front:

> Leaving out trifles such as ricochets and grazes, I was hit at least fourteen times, these being five bullets, two shell splinters, one shrapnel ball, four hand-grenade splinters and two bullet splinters, which, with entry and exit wounds, left me an even twenty scars. In the course of this war, where so much of the firing was done blindly into empty space, I still managed to get myself targeted no fewer than eleven times. I felt every justification, therefore, in donning the gold wound-stripes, which arrived for me one day. (2003, 295)

The injuries, and the danger, risk, bravery, and luck they hint to, come to represent the soldier's efforts at the front. The military distinctions that are bestowed on him as a result—the highest achievable for someone in Jünger's position—are the military's corroboration of this status as a war-made man. To Jünger, the body is the site which justifies his distinction, as well as being the place where it is visibly shown, but the ideals which push the body become apparent in the text: he narrates a distinctly un-panicked sense of accepting one's duty and taking risks while doing so. The affirmative action of narrating one's own experiences is a continuation of this self-fashioning. For Blunden, on the other hand, it is the retrospective gaze which allows him to see himself as a 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat' (242), while Brittain takes up narrative space in a genre of war writing which was (and still is) dominated by men's narratives. Between the three, Blunden's text, which so many critics have called emblematic of the genre, might seems most neutral in its opinions of the war—in its expressed desire to only tell of his experiences (7)—potentially precisely because of this status. An emblematic narrative effectively becomes the norm and might almost feel like it takes no particular stance because it expresses (what have become) the most commonly accepted opinions. Rather we have come to read it, perhaps through schooling, as an unbiased and (therefore close to the truth) perspective—a view which is different from how Jünger's work is taken in. These considerations of war and neutrality

bring me to the rather more elusive aspect of warfare, its literature, and the people that protest war: peace.

Chapter III: For Peace

The Next War

07/01/2020 (fieldnotes)

> 19:43   The meeting is calm and cheerful in tone; most people know each other and have not seen each other in a while. People are chatting in little pockets and the mood is congenial like this until news from outside of the basement of the church starts seeping in via people's phones. Missiles have been fired at US bases in the Middle East.

Four days prior, the Trump administration bombed Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani, killing him. These bombings seemed to be the retaliation. Now, emotions run high in the basement space. People are crying and when we are invited to air our emotions, a feeling of hopelessness or despair is identified by some.

It was the closest I have come to feeling that a war was going to break out—one that might involve me, as I was residing in the capital of the US at that very moment. I had accepted an invitation to join a few VCNV members for a week of action in Washington DC. The activists would often join different peace groups to amplify their numbers and message, and every year they joined Witness Against Torture (WAT) who have advocated for the closure of Guantánamo Bay detention camp and the safe return of the men held there for years.[30]

January 7th was the first night, and protests and actions would start the next day. For one night the possibility of another war seemed very real. Somewhere in my scrambled notes of that evening I have written 'I'd rather not get bombed in a basement (!!) of a church (!!!) in DC (!!)'. Part of the anxiety had to do with my presence in Washington DC at that very moment, and the likelihood the capital of the US might be a target in escalating tensions. Having grown up at a time when various terrorist attacks happened in European cities, considering which city you and

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[30] As Russo (2016) describes in her ethnography of WAT: 'WAT members use their own bodies, voices and privileges to amplify the experiences of those detained at Guantánamo, demanding their release and the state's moral accountability for its actions' (6).

your loved ones are in, and their (cultural, national) importance and likelihood to become a target because of that, have become known pathways to calm myself down. In DC this pathway led to more anxiety, specifically because we were not far from the White House. The other component was my limited access to and understanding of the news (there were conflicting reports coming out), while being in a basement (with only very narrow windows at the top), seemingly cut off from the rest of the world. The people present were pessimistic and worried, expecting retaliations or US deployment of some kind to follow soon enough.

It is clear what worries the group: war. Impending war. Initial reports claim that thirty US soldiers are dead as a consequence of the bombings. People are mad; 'Trump could have known there would be retaliation and he did not care'. People are also concerned about those in their lives who have children or other family members in the military. They are worried they might be deployed; the concern is for the loss of lives and the loss their families will experience. The thirty dead turns out not to be true, and the next war people were so concerned about in those few tense hours never arrives.

Peace is often described through its absence, or arguably its opposite: war (see White 2008). The *OED* presents 'peace' as meaning one of two things: as tranquillity and freedom from disturbance, or as 'a state or period in which there is no war, or a war has ended'. The idea of what peace is comes into focus the moment it is threatened (my experience in the basement was illustrative of this). Stating the opposite and describing war as the absence of tranquillity or peace rings rather strange. Instead, war provides us with tangible means to describe it. War is described as an active state; the state of armed conflict between different parties; a state of competition or hostility, or a sustained campaign against an undesirable situation/activity/people (*OED*). Peace, then, is harder to define.

In practice, the notion of peace is intimately tied to that of war and at various times and places, peace seems to be a concept rather than a reality. Historian Margaret MacMillan, for example, posits as her main thesis in *The War That Ended Peace* (2013a) that rather than looking at why WWI started, one should ask why the long peace preceding WWI

ended.[31] A war can be ended, and thereby peace established, through surrender or armistice. Although the narrative of WWI hardly incorporates peace beyond the solemn remembrance of the war and the armistice, it is through the armistice that peace was established. When we consider peace to be the absence of war this seems simple enough, but on closer inspection more nuance needs to be applied. The absence of war for whom? The 'long peace' knew countless anticolonial conflicts, not to mention that colonialism itself is hardly considered peaceful by its subjugated peoples. The UK and the US went to war ('the war on terror') in Iraq in 2001; it is a war that takes place on foreign soil for both those countries even though they deployed considerable amounts of troops. At the same time, it is entirely possible for a Dutch person such as myself to forget that we went to war in the Middle East with the US as one of our allies. Your country might be at war overseas while you personally (or anyone close to you) are not and are far removed from it. Similarly, the perpetuated narrative might be skewed; after 9/11 it was often repeated that the US had never been attacked on their own soil, a narrative which ignores not only civil war, but countless wars between European settlers and Native Americans on which the modern US is based.[32]

The question of war and peace is one of violence and its absence. Violence and nonviolence form a tricky field, because, as philosopher and theorist Judith Butler points out in *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (2020): 'some people call wounding acts of speech "violence", whereas others claim that language, except in the case of explicit threats, cannot properly be called "violent"' (1). How violence (and the violence of warfare) are framed in a larger context is relevant because the analysis of violence that starts with the physical blow is incomplete, only looking at the symptom: 'sometimes the physical strike to the head or the body is an expression of systemic violence, at which point one has to be able to understand the relationship of act to structure, or system' (Butler 2020; 2). When it comes to protest and social movements that attempt to counter existing political structures and actions—such as peace activism aims to do—the definitions are put under stress and become easily manipulated. As Butler observes: 'Demonstrations, encampments,

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[31] Known as the (somewhat exaggerated) 'Pax Britannica', referring to the period of relative peace between European powers in 1815-1914, largely due to the British Empire's global influence. Also known as 'Britain's imperial century' (Britannica n.p.).

[32] Pearl Harbour is generally excluded from these conversations, as it is not on the US mainland.

assemblies, boy-cotts, and strikes are all subject to being called "violent" even when they do not seek recourse to physical fighting, or to the forms of systemic or structural violence mentioned above' (2020: 2-3). However, there is a difference between these so-called 'violent' acts of (essentially nonviolent) protest and the physical and structural violence they protest—especially in (nonviolent) peace activism. Becoming part of a social movement is tied to 'a particular normative notion about how society should be organized' and they contradict 'the system of rule that prevails in the context in which the social movement operates' (Maeckelbergh 2016: 214). Despite the historical and world-wide prevalence of warfare, the aim of peace activism lies precisely in that very 'utopian' notion. If neutrality is engaged with as a necessary fiction (as I argue in Chapter II) peace is a fiction which is even more hopeful—but no less necessary. Such fictions, after all, might lead us to the profound cultural shift only imagination can offer (White 2008: 4). Unfortunately, it is also true that 'those arguing for peaceful alternatives to war and conflict find themselves on the defensive' (ibid).

Butler already explores the notion of grievability *in Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009), departing from the notion that violence and its moral responses are structured in such a way that it excludes groups of people. As such, 'specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living' (Butler 2009: 1). Butler explains: 'the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated. They are themselves operations of power' (2009: 1). The question at hand then becomes: 'What is a life?' (ibid). And what life is grievable? When seen from this lens, war is a circumstance under which populations are split. They are divided into those that are grievable (living) and not grievable (not living). As Butler posits: 'An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all' (2009: 38). Grievability is closely tied to historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics (2003).

Necropolitics is explained as the 'contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death' (Mbembe 2003: 39). Mbembe has emphasised how modern warfare has made the murder of one's enemy the primary objective of war and thus necropolitics essentially determine who has the right to kill (2003: 12-16). This comes forward in fraught situations, but grievability also relates to mourning, and those who are included and

excluded in official modes of mourning. As previously argued by Crépon, commemoration is also an instrumentalization of the memory of war in order to create social and societal cohesion, and so this memory and memorialisation takes a very specific shape which is mandated by government (2013: 1). The WWI commemoration scandal referenced in Chapter I shows that when Crépon says that '[o]ur memory on occasion abides in some or other survival of prejudice, in the characterizations and caricatures of "peoples" that are propagated in wartime' (ibid), he references the practice of 'othering' one's enemies. This happens for a manifold of reasons, but primarily enables one to see them as enemies and act (attack) accordingly, making them ungrievable. '[D]eath is no longer death since it happens mainly to anonymous others' (Gasché 2013: xxi).

War and the legality of killing in war is one example of how enemies are denied their grievability and thus 'othered' in aid of social cohesion of those who are thereby made the 'same' (or, following Crépon, a 'we'; see Chapter I). Racialised police violence is another example (as indicated in Chapter II). Neither police violence nor the violence of war took place in my presence, but the former was my own concern, and the latter is explicitly disavowed by my activist interlocutors' practices. Police violence in the US mainly concerns its own citizens, and the way the wrongful deaths of Black people in the US are essentially unofficially legalised although the courts' many 'not guilty' verdicts of white perpetrators show that their lives are not considered grievable. Their lives cannot be mourned because they have never been lived; they have effectively 'never counted as a life at all' (Butler 2009: 38). These cases also emphasise Butler's point on what is *called* violence by the state, and the difference with those facing violence at the hands of the state (2020). Grief and mourning can be politicised, but Butler and Mbembe—and my activist interlocutors—are effectively saying they are already political. Grievable or not, victims of war are all suffering, whether we (on whose soil no wars are waged) acknowledge this suffering or not. When VCNV wrote in their closing statement '[w]e're no longer able to visit our friends in Afghanistan and elsewhere in person' (see Chapter I), it signalled one of the main pillars of their activism. Their appeal to friendship is one which effectively reinscribes the individuality of otherwise faceless victims of war; and with that their grievability, previously denied.

Butler reads Walter Benjamin and engages with his views on translation as a means of conflict resolution, because he views the sphere of understanding language as inaccessible to violence (2020: 126). Benjamin foregrounds 'the power of translation to

enhance and augment communicability, suggesting that it can ameliorate impasses in communication' (Butler 2020: 126). The obvious advantage of translation is the increased reach of a text. This reach also crosses borders in an immaterial way: as mentioned in the Introduction, the (German) *All Quiet* was explicitly pointed out by one of the (English) MGC/OCA members as a WWI book written by someone 'who really got it'. Such narratives clearly have the potential and ability to trigger compassion in readers from countries who historically opposed them.

As mentioned in Chapter I, Gasché asserts in the introduction to Crépon's *Memory of War* that 'to experience death as thoroughly singular presupposes being-with-others in a community capable of a "we" that is not exclusive but open to all' (xxi). Noting Benjamin's position on translation, I would argue that first-person narratives bring to the forefront this utterly singular quality of being-with-others—of life. And *All Quiet* specifically, as a first-person narrative ending in death (see Chapter I) transcends national boundaries and makes the even the English-language reader—the former enemy—empathetic towards the German soldier(s) in the narrative. As Ahmed was shown to demonstrate in Chapter I, a crucial role is played in how individual and collective bodies are shaped (2004: 25). The soldier as victim perspective shows a particularly bleak conclusion to war—even for 'the enemy'. The readership of veteran WWI authors would have more veteran readers in the interbellum and after WWII, and they might have felt strongly about national divisions, but this number has radically declined in the present day. While direct experience with war situations has therefore decreased in Europe, our understanding of what is a war narrative is heavily influenced by those very WWI narratives (see Löschnigg and Sokołowska-Paryz 2014). This facilitates the view that these narratives are translations of the universal experience of war, rather than a particular national perspective; they blur national boundaries. They are read as the perspective of individuals losing to the war (in various ways), while anticipating a peace which does not arrive in any of the narratives.

Imagination is the way in which we think beyond what at any given time is 'treated as the realistic limits of the possible', a move which Butler even argues is an ethical obligation (2020: 29). This imagination should not be treated as singular and isolated, but is constituted collectively, such as the WWI narratives which are being read, or my interlocutors who imagine a peaceful future together, and orchestrate their actions around this image. That evening in the basement in DC showed how quickly—instantly—

geopolitical decisions touch individual lives and spin out of their hands. Peace turns out to be as tenuous as the activists suggest and might be gone as a result of actions the public has very little influence on. It also emphasised the direction of the peace activism: there was never any talk about targeting service people, of telling them not to go. The focus turns to and asserts an alternative trajectory. The desired peace seemed to move further out of reach for an evening, and when I returned to my fieldnotes the events in DC inspired further questions on the concept. What is done and addressed in the name of peace in this context, is the focus of this chapter: what does it mean to individual soldiers? How does it relate to pacifism? How do the different peace activists I have encountered in the field engage the idea of peace? And what can a corpus of war literature say about peace?

The Meaning of Peace

Peace after war brings one obvious question to the fore: was it worth it? Particularly if the end of a war is not a 'true peace'. As Kate Kennedy and Trudi Tate elucidate in *The Silent Morning: culture and memory after the Armistice* (2013):

> An armistice is not a declaration of peace, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* reminds us, but is merely a 'cessation from arms; a short truce', from the Latin arma and stitium – arms and stopping. The exchange of fire stopped on 11 November, but it took many months for the peace treaties to be agreed. The war was suspended; the guns were silent, but that silence did not truly signify peace. (2)

This not-quite peace has clear reverberations in the Second World War that started only thirty years after the armistice, prompting historians like Eric Hobsbawm (1994) to call the period 1914-1945 'another Thirty Years' War' (Kennedy and Tate 2013: 3; MacMillan 2013a: xxi). After all, the war received its name change from 'Great' to the 'First' within that timeframe.

Kennedy and Tate further observe that the question of the purpose of the war was on people's minds (in the belligerent countries) in those interwar years, wondering if the war had been worth it—also touched on in the literature and art of the period in nuanced and

complex ways (2013: 1). As he was too old to be drafted, Barbusse voluntary enlisted and went to the front but is nonetheless widely associated with anti-war sentiments, showing that it is indeed possible to both be (seen as) a pacifist and a patriot—or at the very least that one body (or body of work) can hold both these seemingly conflicting positions. *Under Fire* is not the only text of the corpus which has been received as a pacifist text. But if peace is so often defined through the absence of war, how is it defined in its presence?

White observes that when it comes to writers of war 'Some are utopian about peace and others graphically realistic in depicting atrocities in war' (2008: 2). The trench narratives from the corpus (*All Quiet*; *Under Fire*; *Storm of Steel*; *Undertones*) seem to produce texts which are somehow both, alternating between graphic descriptions of bodily harm, to the soldiers discussing and reflecting on the war. Barbusse's characters see and describe some of the most horrific wounds and deaths, which prompts them to argue the purpose of war, life, suffering, and their role in society. In the narrative the word peace only features nineteen times, but in most of those cases, it concerns what I would call 'situational' peace. Barbusse writes of 'the huge sunlit peace of the lush meadows' (2016: 9), about on how 'One can be at peace to-day—it is complete rest, by reason of the overnight march' (ibid: 86), and when 'We held our peace, and hear afar the sound of guns' (ibid: 373). Peace is not the great end of the war, but rather they are small moments, places, and silences. Only a few times does the narrative engage with the wider concept of peace as the antithesis to war. Moreover, there are instances when peace is whatever is not the front – the people in the villages and speculators who make a profit in war—and 'the Rear':

> One point above all had got hold of Volpatte and emerged from his confused and impassioned vision: 'All those soldiers, they haven't to run away with their table-tools and get a bite any old way—they've got to be at their ease—they'd rather go and sit themselves down with some tart in the district, at a special reserved table, and guzzle vegetables, and the fine lady puts their crockery out all square for them on the dining-table, and their pots of jam and every other blasted thing to eat; in short, the advantages of riches and peace in that doubly-damned hell they call the Rear!' (ibid: 125)

As a soldier at the frontline, the relative ease of the rear prompts Volpatte to the describing this 'peace'. The squad seems in agreement that having an easy life while war is raging is an insult to their position. While privates are fighting in the trenches and live off rations, there are others who are living as though it is peacetime still. It is in this context that the ideals of the French revolution are brought up, with 'equality' as the highest in the liberty, equality, and fraternity triad: 'equality is always the same. Liberty and fraternity are words, while equality is a fact' (Barbusse 371). Indeed, the above scene is one of several outbursts about peace and 'the enemy' in the text. These are 'ordinary' soldiers without special rank reflecting on their position, that of civilians, and the state of war. In these discussions, war and peace are presented as the two sides of the same coin, and the opinions on the purpose of the war are divided among the men:

> 'I'm going to die.' The echo came at that moment exactly from Paradis' neighbor [*sic*], who no doubt had examined the wound in his belly. 'I'm sorry on account of my children.'
> 'It's on account of my children that I'm not sorry,' came a murmur from somewhere else. 'I'm dying, so I know what I'm saying, and I say to myself, "*They'll* have peace."'
> (ibid: 369)

Is it worth it? Does this war guarantee peace? Whether the cost of war is worth it is a question for the soldiers in the text as much as it appears to be for contemporary veterans who question the validity and use of the war they were in. The move to peace from war is not clear-cut, and although peace is mentioned, there is more talk of the end of war: '"There must be no more war after this!"' (Barbusse 364) and which is followed with the much-heard allied conclusion referenced in Chapter I: '"There will be no more war," growls a soldier, "when there is no more Germany"' (ibid: 366). Peace is referenced both as option and as absence of war, but primarily as a state of being (for non-combatants), even during war. It is clear, however, that this is the normal state of being and that war is an extreme in which the soldiers are caught in this 'life of prisoners' as they are (ibid: 366-7).

Palmer argues in *Memories from The Frontline* (2018) that the truth and politics of *Under Fire* are habitually unfairly addressed over its literary qualities (157). *Under Fire*'s supposed strong communist message is usually the focal point in English-language criticism,

rather than literary elements such as the style, syntax, or structure of the scenes. On publication in 1916 (with no peace in sight) *Le Feu* was widely praised for its truth, realism, and honesty, but it is the claim to truth that comes forward most positively in contemporary reviews: 'The truth for which it is praised is primarily truth to the experience of ordinary soldiers at the front, and it is this perceived truth that is the key to its reception' (Palmer 2018: 153). Santiáñez also contends out that '*Le Feu* has been hailed as a realist testimony based on the author's war experience and observations, and as the first clear instance of Barbusse's political engagement and activism' (Santiáñez 2016: 304-5). The novel and Barbusse's later communist and pacifist politics are often conflated, and *Under Fire* read as a communist and deeply pacifist text. As Palmer points out:

> In the years following publication, it came to be seen as a pacifist text, especially after Barbusse subsequently openly embraced pacifism and then communism, writing prolifically in favour of pacifism from 1919 through the early 1920s; however, at the time of its publication, this was not a dominant theme in the way it was perceived, and there are good reasons in the text itself to question this attribution. (2018: 153-4)

While clues that point towards pacifism can be found in the text, they are not conclusive and often take away from the analysis of literary aspects (ibid: 158; 153). Pacifism is not one single thing, its meaning has changed over time, and during WWI there was a dominant opinion arguing that 'the precondition of lasting peace was the military defeat of Germany' (ibid: 158). If the end goal is peace, its means need not be peaceful. Not to mention that the end of a war can be seen as an opportunity to ensure that the next one will never arrive.

In Blunden's *Undertones*, too, landscape is restful and 'peaceful': 'In truth it was not a long way behind the trenches, but those trenches were a 'rest sector,' and peace prevailed much nearer their barbed wire and rusty tins than Locon' (1982: 19). Things (landscapes, people, sound) are often described as 'peaceful' (twelve times). However, Blunden does engage with the prospect of peace in the face of the ongoing war he finds himself in, although he does it through absence:

One of the first things that I was asked in C Company dugout was, 'Got any peace talk?' It was a rhetorical question. One of the first ideas that established themselves in my inquiring mind was the prevailing sense of the endlessness of the war. (1982: 25)

News about peace is requested but no answers are expected. Much like the narrator describes, the 'sense of the endlessness of the war' prevails here in these quarters already (ibid). It is towards the end of the narrative, when Blunden is sent back for training, when peace shows itself to be a place, located somewhere, and not a universal state. Already at the beginning of the narrative did Blunden point out how the end of the war seemed impossible to him, but peace may be found in other locales—such as the home front. That which causes such indignation in the characters of Barbusse, in Blunden's text is a safe haven. Barbusse's characters fight in their native France, but Blunden's native soil is safely away and 'I was shown a Brigade message referring to me, and applying to me the same treatment as had already taken Vidler and others from us—namely, six months' duty at a training centre in England' (Blunden 239-40). One of the others hears of the news and 'He gleamed satisfaction as if he were going into peace and not me' (ibid: 240). Rather than the peace that means the end of the war, peace is situational here, too. Although peace in the broad is largely absent in the selected corpus, there are texts which are deemed to completely align with its objective.

Probably hailed as one of the most famous key anti-war texts, Remarque's *All Quiet* has had significant reach and influence since its publication. Remarque was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for it in 1931. It was felt the book has a 'pacifist pathos' which 'moved a core of non-politicized readers but also became a political football for the extremes of the proto-Nazi and Communist press' (Corngold 2005: 210). The Nomination Archive of the Nobel Prize records the following motivation: 'Remarque was nominated for his novel "Im Westen nichts Neues" (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) 1929, in which he depicted a realistic picture of the German army and the horrors of war'.[33] Both the realism and the pacifist message of the novel were emphasised. Remarque's Nobel Peace Prize nomination for a work of literature—rather than in the literature category—is interesting

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[33] From the online Nobel Prize Nomination Archive (www.nobelprize.org/nomination/archive).

because of the explicit purpose of fostering peace that is attributed to it. The Nobel Peace Prize is also an interesting common denominator in the context of this research; Kathy Kelly from VCNV has been nominated for the prize three times. This, too, as an emblem to her commitment to peace and anti-war work. While peace work and the writing of a war novel are decidedly different, both become part of a larger narrative, considered as politically influential and working towards the same peaceful goal.

The nomination placed Remarque and his novel squarely in the anti-war camp, but meanwhile institutional reception was split across two fronts. This is exemplified by the comments section in the summary report where it is stated that: 'The German Officer Association (Deutscher Officier-Bund) protested against Remarque's candidacy, claiming that his book was a gross offence against the German army and the German soldier'.[34] Not long after the nomination, in 1933, *Im Westen* would be selected for Nazi book burning, further fuelling its reputation as an anti-war book. As Stanley Corngold points out in *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of the First World War* (2005), the Nazis felt *Im Westen* 'dishonoured the German war dead', while to 'the Communists, the book was inert, unmobilizable, since its perspective was limited to that of the unenlightened petit bourgeois incapable of thinking through the social contradictions that had led to the war and would continue to lead to war' (210). The post-war situation had all the belligerent countries redefine their national narratives after an intense period of death and permeated borders. Joanna Bourke points out in *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (1996), that the German novel, while popular, was by the 1930s read as a national expression outside of Germany's borders as well (122). She references reviewer Arthur Kenneth Chesterton, who argued of *All Quiet* 'that British soldiers had proved themselves to be more civilized than their German counterparts: "The hysterical scene in the dug-out, caused by excessive fear, could scarcely have happened on our side of the line", he wrote' (in Bourke 122). This is a departure from engagement with the facts of the circumstances in the trenches (such as who had better drainage in the trenches (the Germans) or who had better rations (the British), for example) and engages in an interesting example of national narrative-building, speaking on things such as character, bravery, and morality in action. Remarque himself remained ambiguous when it came to his political stance (Cizmecioglu

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[34] Ibid.

2020: n.p). Veterans at the time supported his view of the war (and still do, see: Eggebrecht 1983; Bernstein 2012). Bernstein emphasises the overwhelmingly positive response to *All Quiet* from veterans after WWI and WWII, pointing out the protagonist's motivations were interesting to them, 'precisely because they could relate to them. I was one of these veterans' (2012: 197). He adds: 'I found the descriptions shocking, if only because I felt I had been to this front once before' (ibid). The notion that WWI was the start of modern warfare, a type of war that persists to this day, is echoed in this veteran's statement.

From a literary perspective, Palmer points out that the ten years after WWI 'saw the publication of the texts showing the most destructive aspects of the war, the texts which since 1945 are the most closely associated with the modern collective memory of 1914–1918, including the Remarque text' (2018: 82). This destructiveness finds its ultimate end in the demise of the protagonist on the final page of *All Quiet*. Baumer dies, giving a fictional yet true answer to the oft-heard and felt survivor's guilt. Veterans often felt the best men had not made it back, and that in fact the truest war experience belongs to those who have died (Gilbert 190; Coker 43; Schneider and Potter 218; see Winter 2017). A bleak and gruesome rendering of WWI, *All Quiet* shows the destruction of a generation: 'We are old folk' (1970: 22). This statement comes after only a few months at the front, where the young men are cut off from both their past and their future, and in the end not even the narrator survives. As Corngold points out, it is as though there is no generation left to carry anything forward into the future (2005: 210). Who would want that? The text emphasises the cruelty (both in action and inertia) and the uselessness of the war—and that the cost is a human one. The human cost of war is also a (if not the main) concern which lies at the heart of peace activism, which will be discussed in that context in the following section.

Not In Our Name

VCNV US rents an apartment that comprises the top two floors of a building in Uptown Chicago, in a neighbourhood that used to be quite poor but is rapidly becoming more gentrified. The house has three rooms on the main floor, and an attic that is being used as a room, which also has an extra bed and a futon. VCNV US is a peace organisation with 'long-standing roots in active nonviolent resistance to U.S. war-making', as they state on their

website. Active nonviolent resistance lies at the heart of their activism and one of the main ways this takes shape is the breaking of sanctions that have been imposed on Iraq and Afghanistan by the US and the United Nations (UN). For the Voices members, peace activism includes fighting against or challenging such economic warfare.[35] Contemporary peace activism is by default always focussed on ongoing wars and conflicts, and often includes economic warfare that is waged through the imposition of economic sanctions. The goal is to minimise or cease the human (and environmental) suffering due to wars, or sometimes very specifically, to minimise or cease the suffering brought on by one's own government. The steps that are taken towards this goal are at the heart of peace activism.

Where it concerns VCNV, and ultimately stopping wars which harm so many is exactly what their anti-war work is about. The activists reject the implicit (necropolitical) notion that the lives of the people caught up in war are not grievable, asserting this with their own bodies when they take to the streets to protest. One of the other ways in which they attempt to assert the grievability of others (such as soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan) is with accounts of both soldiers and civilians from war zones, bearing witness to these harms. Such uses of narrative, drawing connections to suffering and the alleviation of present or avoidance of future suffering, is a tried tactic in activism. One of its iterations is Veterans for Peace and their aim to 'take the narrative back' through their own stories – their prevention of harm includes speaking the truth about their experiences in the military to educate and dissuade people who might otherwise become new recruits (and generally to prevent the military from recruiting teenagers). It is a successful tactic within peace activism and has wide-spread use. As Scarry exemplifies: 'Amnesty International's ability to bring about the cessation of torture depends centrally on its ability to communicate the reality of physical pain to those who are not themselves in pain' (1985: 9). It is a nonviolent mode of activism which highlights violence and its victims. One must trust narrative to be able to relate the reality of victims—and this includes veterans. Although pacifism immediately comes to mind when thinking of peace activists, it is by no means a universally shared stance among the peace activists I lived with. Pacifism is 'the belief that war and

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[35] '[E]conomic warfare, the use of, or the threat to use, economic means against a country in order to weaken its economy and thereby reduce its political and military power' (*Britannica* n.p.).

violence are unjustifiable and that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means' (*OED*). War is, in brief, 'undesirable, unjustifiable and avoidable' (White 2008: 1).

The Peace Pledge Union is Britain's oldest secular pacifist organisation. They are the organisation responsible for the introduction of the White Poppies that can be worn on people's clothing in the month of November in the UK. The petals are white, and the centre is black with the word 'peace' written in it. They are available for a suggested donation of 50p. and the only place I have seen them available is at the Quaker's Friends house in London. The Peace Pledge Union's website reads: 'Created in 1933—just 12 years after the red version—many people wore white poppies to stress the "never again" message, which emerged after WWI, and which pacifists feared was slipping away'. VFP uses these poppies to make a wreath which is laid at the cenotaph in London after the official remembrance Sunday parade. The wreath is made from white poppies and a few red ones, and in the middle the words 'Never Again' are written (fig. 12).

Fig. 12. Wreath with white poppies

While grounded in the notion of peace, the *OED*'s broad definition of pacifism leaves room for various degrees of pacifist behaviour. Must one work towards pacifism? Or is it a matter of declining (violent) involvement, even if the consequences are severe? WWI texts show situations where the narrators have little choice, while the ethnographic fieldwork shows an engagement with this question free from military restraints or the restraints of a war. If one does identify as a pacifist, this might entail nonviolent resistance and direct action towards that goal, as is the case for many Quakers. The case for pacifism becomes more complicated

when faced with issues such as acting in self-defence, for example, or, as anthropologist Tobias Kelly's work shows, when it comes to conscientious objection to compulsory military service. For example, some of Kelly's research has focused on British conscientious objectors during WWII (see Kelly 2018; 2020). 'Conscientious objector' refers to someone 'who refuses to do something on the grounds of conscience' (*OED*) and originates in the WWI draft. During WWI there were those people and conscientious objectors who were considered pacifists and those who were 'absolutists' or 'alternativists', who did not only refuse to fight but also refused to participate in the war effort in any way, shape, or form. This included non-combatant roles in the Royal Army Medical Corps or Non-Combatant Corps, or other work in service of the war effort.

Conscientious objectors faced judgement and disdain as WWI was going on. There are examples of with women placing feathers into the jackets of able-bodied men that were still at home rather than at the front, publicly marking and ridiculing them as 'cowards'. In the case of both World Wars, it is worth to consider Kelly's reminder there too: it was a war between empires (2020: 321). Kelly suggests that although '[c]onscientious objection is often treated as a fundamentally ethical issue', this might not be the most effective framework to engage with' (319). The stance of these non-pacifist peace activists in VFP and Voices suggests that they do not consider pacifism an ethical issue, in some way recognising that '[f]raming conflicts in ethical terms can have implications for who is allowed to speak, in what ways, and about what issues' (Kelly 2020: 320, following Brown 2015). Kelly turns to 'justice' as an analytical concept rather than moving these questions into the realm of ethics (320). This allows him to refocus on matters of distribution and recognition: 'distribution in the sense of the differential allocation of the ability to oppose war, and recognition in the sense of the ways in which particular claims are acknowledged' (Kelly 321). It is hard to speak on the stance of women put to work in the war effort, for example, as they were not called to service and thus had no direct reason or platform to object the way the drafted men did (see also Kelly 2018). The position of colonial troops is similarly obfuscated; enlistment campaigns often enticed with promises that were not met, and some were

drafted with little choice—and for (racialised) colonial subjects there were but few ways to oppose and challenge European empires.[36]

Some of the members of VFP are themselves conscientious objectors of much more recent armed conflicts than WWI and WWII, a position that might still result in prison time. Kelly points out that in the context of conscientious objectors in the UK, the refusal of violence is an act which can technically challenge the legitimacy of the state (2018: 20). However, when the focus is shifted onto the question of individual scruples and responsibility, this often serves to deflect from questions over the legitimacy of violence and instead reshapes the debate as one about the presence (or lack thereof) of sincere convictions (ibid). One can wonder if VFP is trying to bridge this gap (see Chapter II); some members have become conscientious objectors from personal conviction, but their work as veteran peace activists specifically aims to question the legitimacy of the state and its monopoly on violence. Objecting to British military presence and violence across the globe and proposing neutrality as an alternative, challenges and engages the politics of the state—with a focus on how they (negatively) affect individuals, rather than states. It appears that the conscience of the VFP members is easier to recognise than that of the non-veteran peace activists. The people critiquing peace protesters are often civilians themselves, who seem to acknowledge (for the most part) that the veterans have more experience and authority on the matter.

One of the questions central to the position of civilian and veteran peace activists is that of authority; the veterans are the ones who know warfare first-hand. In this sense the narrative surrounding the veterans is no different than that of the veteran writers of WWI. Their accounts are eye-witness accounts by people who are pre-empted from succumbing to a moral panic over the myriad of harmful things which comprise warfare (weapons, killing, bodily harm, injury, etc.) because of their past service. Ex-military are also generally respected by the general public—they will be listened to, taken seriously, or at least not mocked and told they should 'get a real job' the way the civilian peace activists are told. The veteran activists bridge a space between activists and non-activists (civilians/general public) but their position within activist groups is also important to note. They are peace activists

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[36] The reasons for this stem directly from the status of 'colonial subject' but ranged from religious to racial difference (see Kelly 2020).

now, which carries weight because of their military past, and there seems to be no judgement from the other peace activists where it concerns these past actions. At times it seems a rather improbable bond between those who will not even pay war taxes and are life-long pacifists, and those who chose to go into the military and have probably experienced active combat. Eng and Kazanjian suggest in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (2003) that there is the potential for a move from traumatic experiences such as in war towards political activism (10; Craps 2017: 489). This is echoed by memory studies scholar Stef Craps (2017), who posits that such 'prescient grieving' are 'efforts to reclaim mourning as a potent political practice' (489). It is thus not only past experiences, but also narratives of others and imagination which can propel people to act politically. Many civilian and present-day peace activists might initially have no such experiences, but find themselves motivated through imagined past, present, and future suffering (see Chapter II). Moreover, their commitment to peace often leads them to war zones where they bear witness to conditions that further fuel their peace-making efforts.

All the materials of my fieldwork, all the books, the diaries, the postcards, the shrapnel and shells, the stories of missing family members or those that came back changed, have shaped my perceptions of war and peace over the last years. In this context war is never something any of my activist interlocutors are positive about. Not the descendants of WWI soldiers, not the (civilian) peace activists, and not the Veterans for Peace. Their level of displeasure ranges from anger towards politicians, to direct action, to the story of a US veteran activist who committed suicide after he heard Obama was going to send more troops into Afghanistan. The Netherlands is no longer neutral, and has not been since it was an occupied country in WWII. The legacy of neutrality is mostly forgotten, and Dutch people like myself are only nominally aware the Dutch went into Iraq and Afghanistan with the US and the UK. Peace seemed to be what we had in the last 30 years: no invasion, no occupation, no draft or compulsory service. A war fought overseas did not seem to be part of that; active combat is perpetually elsewhere—geographically, temporally or both. Peace, in short, is the calm life most of us have in the West. Living in the UK and the US with peace activists that question and challenge their government's domestic and international actions and policy, shifts the focus away from that 'peaceful' point of view. Peace becomes the absence of war—but only in your immediate surroundings.

In reality, my activist interlocutors do not engage in conversations regarding the level of peace they want to see in the world, or whether they think world peace is possible. Only once did someone's opinion on this come up and they did not envision a world without armies, nor did they consider themselves a pacifist. The prevention of further wars, the prevention of escalating conflict, the easing of ongoing conflict, the alleviation of the suffering of innocent civilians and all other people; these are goals which, to peace activists, are perfectly congruous with feeling that countries should have military power (see VFP's Neutral Country campaign, discussed in Chapter II).

Peace activism as I have seen it living with VCNV members in two countries addresses a myriad of things. These range from addressing their governments and fellow citizens, aiming to pressure (mostly in the case of government) or convince them to do, cease or demand things such from stopping overseas wars and the trade of arms to care for veterans and civilians in war zones. For the activists themselves their actions can be as everyday as helping a veteran with PTSD to get through their day, being part of a soup kitchen in the community, or bringing medicine into a region where economic sanctions prohibit this. Memory studies scholar Ann Rigney (2018) suggests that hope is associated with uncertainty, but that it is precisely this uncertainty which invites action (370). Taking from Williams (1970), Rigney emphasises that hope is a 'structure of feeling' and that this 'informs civic action and motivates the struggle for a better life, if only in the form of small acts of resistance rather than of revolutionary transformations' (2018: 370-1).[37] This change in directionality of memory studies, is also addressed by Craps, who suggests 'proleptic mourning' as a concept relating to the idea of anticipating loss and memory (2017: 479). 'Mourning future losses proleptically in order for these losses not to come to pass in the first place' (ibid: 489). It is a practice I have found to be common among peace protestors, as peace activism moves along the lines of both hope and (pre-emptive) mourning. The peace activism I have witnessed is best summarised in a quote that has been attributed to American author and activist Grace Paley: 'The only recognizable feature of hope is action'.

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[37] Williams states that: 'In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization.' And '[…] it is on it that communication depends' (1961: 48).

Although Kathy Kelly would say that there is no way of knowing the influence our actions might have, and small acts of resistance might lead to revolutionary transformations.

On one of the occasions I spoke with Kathy, she referenced Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, and the need for (re)reading it, revisiting a time where it felt the trajectory of history could have gone a different way. She explained this imagining as follows:

> It is interesting because we did talk about effectiveness but—it has seemed to me, historically, that the United States did come close to having a country-wide rooted anti-war movement that almost stood a chance at preventing the United States going into WWI. And so, and then the fact that it waged that war to sacrifice all those lives. The fact that it was so futile, that made so little sense by any stretch of the imagination to sacrifice all of those lives in WWI. So, it just seems important to stay with that time in history and try to understand what might have been done differently to actually prevent WWI. You know, that ticked people into going into it?

Kathy's point is emphasised by MacMillan, who writes that '[t]he strongest and most influential peace movement before 1914 was in the United States, followed closely by Britain and France' (2013a: 275). Countries which saw themselves as successfully building prosperous and stable societies would have them endowed with the mission 'to spread their superior and peaceful civilisation for the benefit of all' (ibid). While thus being partial to continued non-involvement, the US did join WWI, and the line of questioning, of imagining what might have happened if they had not, falls along the line of what Gabriela Manley (2022) calls a 'counterfactual reimagination exercise' (4). Certain parts of the past are refashioned and rethought as an impulse for an (imagined) future, in a move which focusses 'on futural potential rather than pastime returns' (Manley 2022: 6), and it is exactly this which has Kathy's focus. As I have argued in relation to WWI and WWI literature, fiction can be considered not as outside of, or opposed to, reality, but as something which partakes in its making. While Kathy has a long activist history focused on this future-making, there was a VCNV member whose connection to peace activism went back to her grandfather, who was a conscientious objector in WWI. The following section considers her view on how this relates to her current involvement with peace activism.

Passionate & Passive Peace Activism

Moving from protests in the US at the start of this chapter, to those in UK, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is worth briefly expanding on. Quakers have consistently been a presence at peace protests when I was in the field in the UK. I stayed with Helen, a VCNV member and Quaker, at her house in Bristol at the start of fieldwork and had standing plans for another visit when COVID-19 lockdowns prevented me from exiting the Netherlands at the start of 2020. The last evening of my stay we were seated in her living room and had a conversation about her activism. Helen's Quaker upbringing informs a lot of her activism, as pacifism is central to the religion. She told me that not only her Quakerism but also her peace activism, are inspired by these family ties and the Quaker belief that, as she pointed out: 'faith comes from lived experiences'. Helen describes seeing it as coloured ribbons:

> I know these kinds of strands, I see it like lots of ribbons of different colours that come into your life and they start to weave together. So as I am saying one thing, I'm thinking: 'well actually, that wouldn't have been like that if there hadn't been that other strand coming in to the woven fabric of whatever I am'.

Helen felt the pull to do peace work in Palestine, while her grandfather already worked with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as early as 1948. Without her consciously thinking about it, these are two of the ribbons weaving together the fabric of her person. Faith is a lived experience of which direct action is an integral part in this case. Her grandfather was already involved in peace activism, as he went to run a Quaker school in Lebanon (one of only two in the Middle East, the other is in Ramallah, in the West Bank). Helen speaks about it with some distance, signalling this might not necessarily by her belief or practice, when she states her grandfather felt he was 'called by God' and therefore had to take up the challenge. She explains it as an element within Quakerism. One does not say 'no' when asked to do something:

> Meanwhile a whole other strand is my grandfather again, the one who was the conscientious objector in the First World War. He went to teach in the Middle East because there's two Quaker schools in the Middle East: one in

Ramallah, which is now in the West Bank and one in Beirut, in Lebanon. So, my whole childhood was Lebanon oriented. I was born in the mid-fifties and so my very early childhood, my toys, dollies, clothes, were all made in refugee camps in Lebanon. With all the white linen with the red and black stitching on, which was the particular style of the Palestinian traditional embroidery—of the group who were in Sabra Shatila and all those camps.

And he met, he talks about, talks about meeting Palestinian refugees in '49 in a small village in the mountains above Beirut where the school was— is. And he talked to us about, you know, 'there's a great injustice is being carried out' and 'In Europe we don't really understand what a massive injustice is being meted out onto the Arab people'. And: 'this is going to cause a lot of trouble in the future'. And he was absolutely right. So, he was a kind of an Orientalist, kind of. Very naïve English man who just turned up because with Quakers, if you're asked to do something you don't say no. So, he and his wife were asked to go and run this school in the Middle East. [laughs] I think he put it: 'God called me to do this'. And 'How could we not say we would do it?' Even though they had absolutely no background in the Middle East at all, um, he made a good fist of it. He learned Arabic and Hebrew, and everything.

Helen seems to take the Christian notion of being led by God into action less seriously than her grandfather did, but there is a sense of events not being entirely accidental in her description. The image of ribbons in life weaving together is not dissimilar to the ripple effect described by Judith, save for one vital element. The ripple effect starts with a WWI ancestor who went to the front never to return (see Chapter I). Mourning his loss is the pebble in the pond that causes the ripples that keep rippling outwards and having an effect into the future. For Helen's ribbons, much of the origin also lies in a WWI ancestor.

However, he had a life after the war. He became a Quaker because of it, and that life left different strands for Helen to be woven into her life at a later time. In that sense, the ripple effect is more an echo, absence, or gap—an ending— while the coloured ribbons are more positive and deal with the effects of presence and memory, as well as hope for the future. The ribbons come together to positively constitute a person, but the ripples delineate the impact of loss and silence on family and loved ones over time, cumulating in

the need for remembrance. Helen's grandparents leaving for the Middle East because her grandfather was called to do so—and then being able to assess what was going on because he was on the ground, interacting with people, clearly influenced Helen. It might not have been immediate, but what she describes is an influence which was allowed to linger before she acted on it. The moral question of the injustices that have been and are carried out find a response in Helen addressing them anew. As philosopher Linda Zagzebski (2013) points out, 'narratives are crucial to shaping our vision of a good life' (193). The action to engage in peace activism in Palestine is rooted in religious and moral motivations, and Helen's grandfather becomes somewhat of an exemplar. Not necessarily from a moral point of view (something I will return to later in this chapter)—Helen's tone is practical when she explains that Quakers do not say no when they are asked to do something—but from an actionable perspective.

Quakerism was initially explained to me by Helen as 'a sect of Christianity' that is almost 400 years old. The Quakers, or by their official name, The Religious Society of Friends, are considered to be one of the traditional 'peace churches'—Christian churches or groups who advocate (Christian) pacifism or Biblical non-resistance.[38] Quakers do not have 'fixed creed', instead they work through 'testimonies' of which the main focal points are 'equality, peace, truth, justice and simplicity' (*Quakers in Brittain* 2023 (a): n.p.). The *Friends Committee on National Legislation* phrases their commitment—and conviction—as follows: 'Peace and Security can only be achieved by peaceful means' (2019: 5). Of their religious practice they say that: 'We don't offer neat creeds or doctrine. Instead, we try to help each other work out how we should live. All people are welcome and accepted at a Quaker meeting' (*Quakers in Brittain* 2023 (b): n.p.). Starting in the 1650s, there have been various peace declarations by notable Quakers and the 'Friends Peace Testimony' is one of the best-known Quaker testimonies, describing the actions of Quakers for peace and against (participation in) war. As the preamble of *The World We Seek: statement of Legislative Policy* from 2019 (the Quaker lobby in the US) narrates:

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[38] Generally, these are: the Church of the Brethren (and their daughter churches), the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and various groups of Mennonites.

Since the early days of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), God's spirit has led friends to take action in the world. This spirit has called Friends to recognise the equality of all people, challenge hereditary privilege, help end legal slavery, struggle against oppression, and reduce suffering by violent conflict. (1)

While this is said in the United States, Quakers in the United Kingdom similarly state that: 'Quakers believe that nonviolent confrontation of evil and peaceful reconciliation are always superior to violent measures. Peace testimony does not mean that Quakers engage only in passive resignation; in fact, they often practice passionate activism' (*Quaker Cloud* n.p.). Helen is herself a granddaughter of a WWI conscientious objector, who became a Quaker after the war. Kelly points out that when it came to conscientious objection:

In mid-twentieth-century Britain, a long-term affiliation with a pacifist group or church was most persuasive of all, with Quakers in particular representing the gold standard. Quakers seem to have been convincing partly because of their historical links with pacifism in the eyes of the wider public. The Quaker style of conscience openly acknowledged its duties to other British citizens. […] The vast majority of claims were only accepted at the tribunal if the applicant agreed to undertake some form of service. (2018: 18)

Quakers were on average more pacifist than absolutist and known to be especially devout—and were thus perceived as consistent in their pacifism. Therefore, Quakers stood a good chance at being allocated non-combatant military service. However, Helen's grandfather became a Quaker after the war and raised his children, and they their children, in the Quaker faith. Through WWI and his conscription, her grandfather—like others at the time—was forced to closely examine his position on war and peace while there would not previously have been any explicit reason to. In many ways the different peace activists I have encountered are outliers because they are not living in war zones—their countries fight wars on foreign soil. They are not forced to deal with these questions of action and morality, but they engage them nonetheless. In that sense, this move is an explicit effort they make. Within peace activism in the UK (and US), and specifically with the Quakers I have encountered in the UK, people actively try to show and convince others of the

importance of the issues they are protesting. 'Passionate activism' or a more active than passive version of activism, seems as deliberately present in Helen's life, and that of her forebears, as the quoted official statement would suggest.

Historically, there is a distinction between 'positive pacifism', which celebrates peace, and 'negative pacifism', which opposes war (White 2008: 6). In the practice of peace activists, this might differ. As noted in Chapter II, VFP does not identify as a pacifist organisation. Within VCNV on the other hand, not all members identify as 'positive pacifists' to borrow the term, but they are all passionately anti-war; 'negative pacifism'. While the reasoning on a conceptual level stands, I feel an unease in the description of my interlocutors as 'negative pacifists' as their activism is informed by a life-affirming outlook on the world. This was particularly salient at instances such as at the DSEI protests. Briefly mentioned in the Introduction, DSEI is a biannual arms fair in London. One would be hard-pressed to describe protesting arms sales as a 'negative' form or focus of protest. Quaker Roots, for example, are a group of Quakers specifically opposed to DSEI, where they engage in nonviolent resistance. Quaker Roots states the following: 'Refusal to fight with weapons is not surrender. We are not passive when threatened by the greedy, the cruel, the tyrant, the unjust. We will struggle to remove the causes of impasse and confrontation by every means of nonviolent resistance available' (2013: 24.10).

The DSEI protests were my introduction into peace activism, in the field and in life. On one of the days, the 'Faith Day', there was a larger crowd than on the other days and more people were arrested. The form of protest chosen by the Quaker Roots was sitting in the road, alternately singing, and sitting in silence—the latter of which comprises 'Quaker worship'. Blocking the road was considered an arrestable offence, as it fell under the Highways Act 1980: under 'blocking a highway', for which there is a penalty.[39] The Quakers were the very picture of 'peaceful protest'—a tactical mode of worship and protest as it is illegal for the police to break up an act of worship. And when the police did arrest them, this retort would be used in court. The passion of the Quakers' activism is notable because they are by no means part of a momentous movement: peace activism has dried up considerably since the 60s (both in the US and the UK and many of the people in it have been active since then). The peace activists presented a narrative that is very straightforward in idea and

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[39] See Appendix F for the full Highways Act 1980.

intention: this fair sells weapons, some of which are 'battle-proven'; these weapons have and will harm people.[40] The protesters aim to stop and deter this, knowing full well this is unlikely to happen (DSEI protest has yet to be successful), but not stopping because of that. Their argument (a legal argument that is often used by peace activists in court cases) is that they are here, breaking the law, under 'Necessity or Duress of Circumstances'. A legal clause under which one is permitted to commit a crime to prevent a greater crime, harm, or evil.[41] In this case the sale that leads to use of these weapons and the harm they will inflict.

This reasoning, which is very present in all peace activism I have witnessed (both religious and secular), is perhaps best captured in the words of CW founder Dorothy Day which were often repeated to me: 'It is more important to be faithful than to be effective'. Within activist circles this seems to be read as: peace activism might not seem particularly impactful, but it is important not to be deterred because it is better to be faithful to your ideals and not let concerns of effectiveness stop you. Remaining neutral is not an option because the emphasis is on acting in accord with one's own beliefs. Kathy has pointed this out when I spoke with her:

> There's a very strong urge within the peace movement to act in accord with your intentions rather than evaluating on whether or not you'll be successful. What I'd say is that it's really hard to calculate if something is successful because you don't know in time or across the world where the impact might be felt. (Ostendorf 2021: 83-4)

Staying static would be disingenuous to those beliefs, whether what we think of as impact is obvious or not. When it comes to peace activism this stance shows itself on the ground as well, as the groups are often quite small, and their impact is easy to call into question. Peace activism as such goes against the feeling of powerlessness one might feel in cases where the problems faced are too big to tackle or comprehend (such as war or, as a different example, climate change). Dorothy Day and the repetition of her teaching of faithfulness over effectiveness indicates the influence particular individuals can have on the activist views and

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[40] One specific Israeli company (Elbit Systems) uses 'battle-proven' as a salespoint, which means they have been used against Palestinian people.
[41] See Appendix G for the Necessity (Duress of Circumstances) Act.

practices of others within the wider peace movement. In the last section of this chapter, I want to focus on the role of some specific interlocutors, and their influence as moral exemplars.

Exemplars of Peace

> This is the only time in my many years serving America that I have felt I cannot represent the policies of an Administration of the United States. I disagree with the Administration's policies on Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, North Korea and curtailment of civil liberties in the U.S. itself. I believe the Administration's policies are making the world a more dangerous, not a safer, place. I feel obligated morally and professionally to set out my very deep and firm concerns on these policies and to resign from government service as I cannot defend or implement them. (Wright n.p.)

The text above is part of the 2003 resignation letter of (retired) Colonel Ann Wright, now a member of VFP US.[42] (Ret.) Col. Wright told me she counts the invasion of Iraq as the starting point for her activism. Until the 2003 invasion she was working for the US government as a diplomat after having retired from the US military after a long career. After this she was one of three State Department officials who publicly resigned in direct protest of the Iraq invasion. Her resignation letter was published online the day after her resignation, to great public interest.

Rather than trying to influence policy, (Ret.) Col. Wright was on the implementing side of these policies, representing the US government, and her protest took the shape of stepping away from this role. Ever since she has been a very active part of several peace organisations, among which VFP. Other peace activists have mentioned Wright's specific skillset in this regard. She has a different background to most VFP members, as she never saw active combat but was one of the people giving orders. The professionalism and morality she mentions in her resignation letter are also present in her activism. People

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[42] See Appendix H for the full letter.

would tell me that whenever she shows up at protests, everything straightens out. Without orders being barked, organisation always benefits when she is there. Due to her impressive career, only a few question her experience as a veteran and as a member of VFP, and there is a noticeable respect and sympathy for her position. There was one occasion where an anchor at Fox News accused Wright of being 'unpatriotic' during an interview and she told him: 'I have served this country for 29 years, what have you done?' Then her microphone was cut.[43]

In her work on moral exemplars, Linda Zagzebski (2013) addresses the role of morality as 'a motivating emotion', and the role narratives might have here (194). Zagzebski:

> Narratives capture the imagination, and elicit emotions that motivate action. It might seem impossible that a theory can include an emotion—not the concept of an emotion, but an emotion itself, but that is what I am going to propose. The motivating element is contained in the theory. (2013: 196)

I take narrative to mean storytelling, both on a literary level and in terms of oral histories or life stories. The way some of the activists I have met live their life, is seen as admirable and/or impressive, and I believe that they are in some sense looked up to as moral exemplars by other peace activists. Modes of exemplars in Caroline Humphrey's research (1997) show themselves to be 'interiorized and subjective, permeating someone's action in general rather than single acts' (34). In Humphrey's analysis these exemplars are not someone we should all look up to, but their influence as an exemplar plays out on a more personal level (ibid). They exert an influence which is not about following rules (Humphrey 27). Rather, exemplars are related to, and the subject must consider them (the exemplar) and their relation to their (the subject's) own life, which means that 'exemplars as moral discourse are open-ended and unfinished' (Humphrey 34). Zagzebski explains the moral exemplar as 'a paradigmatically good person', someone who is 'most admirable' (2013: 201). 'We identify the admirable by the emotion of admiration. […] The feeling of admiration is a kind of attraction that carries the impetus to imitate with it' (ibid). The force of emotion and potential for action Ahmed theorises comes forward here, too. Ahmed

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[43] See Appendix I for a link to the recording.

identifies how we feel about others as one of the things which aligns people with a collective, and in fact shapes it (2013: 27). Emotions are what moves us, and she emphasises that 'emotions are also about attachments, about what connects us to this or that' (ibid). This means that 'what attaches us, what connects us to this or that place, or to this or that other […], what moves us, or what affects us such that we are no longer in the same place (ibid). Despite the name 'moral' exemplar, I would argue that the considerations my other interlocutors have of these 'moral exemplars' in the way they talk about them, have to do more with being 'impressed by' as an emotion which is not strictly linked to morality. As Sarah, one of the VCNV members in Chicago, told me: 'I would meet these people that were just doing really cool things'. This is what moved her towards activism and eventually living in community at the VCNV house in Chicago. She did not think of them as doing the *right* thing, but as cool and interesting—and eliciting the feeling of admiration Zagzebski identifies as essential above. Moral exemplars are an example of how emotions do not only come from within, moving outward, but can come 'from without, from the thickness of sociality itself' (Ahmed 2013: 28).

Within the field, Kathy Kelly and (Ret.) Col. Wright are two prominent examples of people who function as moral exemplars to others. The impressive rise through the ranks in (Ret.) Col. Wright's career/life story before resisting her government's position on moral grounds and the subsequent peace activism is something which is looked up to. While her military experience is not combat-based in the way other VFP members' experience often is (as she has a higher rank than most in the organisation), it is felt she carries veteran authority in the same way. Moreover, her presence and organisational prowess are a further reimbursement of her status as a retired Colonel.

It seems that Kathy, too, is seen as a moral exemplar to many people within the peace movement (both in the US and UK). Things she has said and wisdom she imparted is repeated among the people from different peace groups, and many explicitly remember meeting her and talking to her, and she is looked at as an example of nonviolent resistance. She has said—and has been quoted by several others to have said—that: 'the best place to spend Christmas is either in prison or in a warzone'. I have heard this phrase more often from others in the peace movement, with the added 'Kathy always says…'. For many years of her life this was the reality, and she was either in the Middle Eastern war zones or in Federal prison at Christmas time. Her statement gives a whimsical note to a life seriously

devoted to peace activism. Kathy's and commitment to peace —evident from actions ranging from war tax refusal, to travelling into war zones and prison sentences, and the way she conducts herself and relays these experiences—functions as an inspiration to others. As mentioned, she has been in warzones often. She has been arrested for her activism over sixty times, has been on the FBI's watchlist, and has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times. These activist feats of arms are known to others and signpost her commitment in their conversations. Her level of commitment inspires others not to simply do the same, but to push themselves in their actions and commitment to peace. One of the VCNV member's characterised Kathy as 'formidable but not intimidating', which still feels like the most accurate characterisation I have heard. Kathy's activism has shown to be tenacious and the consequences to her personal life far-reaching, as it is geared almost entirely towards facilitating her peace work.

Kathy has been a war tax refuser for decades. War tax resistance is the refusal to pay some or all taxes that pay for the war efforts of a country, and this can be done legally by lowering one's taxable income. In practice this means having an annual income below $12,000 (under the age of 65). Despite the seemingly basic quality Graeber attributes to it (203), in practice it is one of the more extreme measures—the refusal to have a taxable income is something that has a far-reaching structural impact on one's life. The possibility of having a 'normal job' is taken off the table and the war tax refuser needs to find other means and structures to support themselves. The refusal to pay taxes to a system you not only disagree with, but actively move against, is one part of direct action Graeber refers to, and which can be seen in the war tax refusal of some activists. It is generally considered to be a staunch approach because it could effectively mean a life in poverty. In the case of Kathy, this means part of the activism of VCNV as an organisation is sustaining its members: providing war tax refusers with a means to live. She is effectively showing people an example of a life committed to peace. Following Humphrey's findings, this gives people (activists) something against which, and with which they can assess their own actions and opinions, without getting weighed down by grand notions such as 'right' and 'wrong'. I have observed this attitude among the peace activists in a wider sense: when it comes to being arrested, for example, it is addressed like a personal (moral, practical) choice, rather than a choice which might lead to acting in a (morally, ethically) right or wrong way. Rather, stories of Kathy and (Ret.) Col. Wright's activism function a prism through which the activists can

reflect on their commitment to peace. Helen from VCNV UK, for example, told me she initially thought of herself as wanting to become a UK version of Kathy Kelly.

It is notable that in the characterisations of both women, there is a sense that while the issues pressing and their activism resolute, they are not considered to be overbearing or aggressive. It was only made explicit by one member that they saw a 'feminine hand' in their way of working. Considering the abuse members get during some of their actions, and the element of their activism which tries to educate others, this notion of not alienating those around you is important; living and acting in alignment with their beliefs—nonvionlence—is particularly so. In the effort to reshape one's life in alignment with those beliefs, moral exemplars show how such a life might be lived. This does not mean they only make the 'right' choices, rather 'substantive matters about what makes a person good need not be settled at the outset. We need not start by assuming that certain traits are the virtues or that certain acts are right' (Zagzebski 2013: 200).

This chapter has described some of the ways in which the notion of 'peace' is a contact point between seemingly disparate aspects of my corpus and fieldwork, looking at the ways it is considered, described, and propagated, concluding with moral exemplars in the present. The following chapter brings us back to the battlefields of WWI.

Chapter IV: Machine and Body

Six Men Manning

Graham: Number one was the man who actually fired the gun. In a lot of cases, he would be a lance-corporal, that's one up from a private, the lowest rank.

Number two was his assistant, who fed the belts of ammunition into the gun while the man was firing it. The number two would be assisting, keeping it fed with ammunition.

Judith: And the number two took the barrel. Because as they ran forward the number one carried the tripod and ran forward and went—*boom!*—with the tripod and the number two went—boom!—with the barrel—

Graham: —with the gun, yeah. Number three was a range-taker. Now he was specially trained to use an optical instrument, which was a long tube—about this long—on a little mount, and it was put on the ground, and he would look through two little—just like binoculars and this thing was designed to be able to help him find exactly how far away the target was.

[…]

Number four was the signaller. Now, there were always supposed to be field telephones, which connected to the brigade headquarters where they could receive information and send rapports back. Now, if the wires got broken, which they frequently did, through shellfire, mortar fire, the signaller's job, initially, was supposed to give information by using flags. [gestures with his arms] […] But that was very dangerous because that man would have to stand up.

And the enemy were over there, and… you know. It figures that signaller's job was not good. So, the use of flags soon stopped. Because it was too risky for a signaller to expose himself to being shot. So, they tended to use a runner. This was somebody who they

would give a written message to. 'Give that to HQ'. So, it would be his job to run back half a mile or so. Quite dangerous because obviously there were shells coming in and people, machine guns shooting over there, but… that's what happened.

Number six was nominally described as a scout. He could be used to maintain contact between, uhm, this company and the next company and do whatever he was told to do. In addition to that, these two guys, number five and number six, doubled up as ammunition carriers. Now the belts of ammunition were carried two hundred fifty bullets, they were canvas straps with little spaces in them into which the bullets were pushed. And there was a brass tab on one end and that went through in through the gun and that engaged in the firing mechanism. And it could then fire two hundred fifty rounds, and that went out the other side, and then the next one went in. well, these were carried in rectangular boxes, ammunition boxes, and one box would contain perhaps four belts.

Before Judith Lappin shared the details of her grandfather Wilfred's death discussed in Chapter I, she told me about his role in the Machine Gun Corps. He was 'a number two'; number two in the team of six men manning a Vickers machine gun. All six soldiers were trained to do all the jobs described above by Graham, should one of them be harmed or killed and unable to perform his designated task to keep the gun in action. But unless that happened, the men would enact their—numbered—roles. Comparisons of the soldiers as being mere cogs in a military machine are particularly visible in this instance. The roles these men inhabited have come into existence due to the technology that they are paired with. The soldiers are fitted around the functionality of the weapon.

The machine gun is an excellent example of a theme derived from the cultural knowledge of my interlocutors (Bajc 2012: 80). I took this thematic approach to re-read the works of my corpus and investigate the ways in which these narratives interacted across disciplines. Details about the workings of the machine guns their ancestors manned seem particularly relevant for descendants of the British machine gunners. It provides some detail which allows one to imagine more precisely what the gunners have done, what their life

was like in combat, and how their relationships were shaped. What did they do? How must they have felt? For the MGC/OCA members, some of the grey area in these questions can be coloured in with the details of life as a machine gunner. This is especially true if we consider how much information about the soldiers' lives has gotten lost through the death of the soldiers themselves and the comrades who would have known more, and damage to official records. While we might be used to thinking of the machine as dominating, especially in the context of soldiers' narratives being overwhelmed by the firepower of WWI (as we shall see later in this chapter), the six roles of machine gun crew provide a relational context for understanding war experience of ancestors that is lacking due to loss of records and memories.

As she told me, Judith's grandfather was a number two, assisting the number one by feeding the gun with belts of ammunition and taking the barrel when the machine gun needed to be moved. The number two was also responsible for changing the barrel of the machine gun, as one can shoot a limited amount with one barrel before it turns so hot it starts melting. The barrel needs to be swapped out and two of them are constantly rotated. The apparent straightforwardness of the roles are accompanied by their risk. The machine gun and its number one and two would be the direct target of many, and while the four other roles are more and more removed from the physical gun by small steps, they are all vital and necessary to keep the machine gun going. The risk to these men's lives would be different but not reduced. As Graham points out above: 'a signaller's job was not good'. The image below shows four MGC men in action during the Battle of Menin Road Ridge (fig. 13).

Fig. 13. A British Vickers machine gun crew in action, 21 September 1917

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The imaginaries we have of WWI are often to do with the latter years of the war, at it is those visuals that have branded themselves in the public consciousness. However, elements have shifted throughout the years and reality and popular representation do not always add up. For example, when the war started in 1914 the British military initially did not have helmets but felt caps. The first million steel helmets were only distributed among the British ranks in May 1916. Similarly, as pointed out by Fussell in *The Norton Anthology of Modern War* (1991), in the years before WWI armies did not seem very interested in the machine gun, instead 'preferring to remain with well-tried instruments like man and horse, rifle, and bayonet and saber' (18). Fussell continues: 'There was even a sense that the use of the machine gun was rather unsporting. It was all right to try it out on rebellious natives in colonial Africa, but to aim it at a gentleman was not quite appropriate' (ibid). Even in colonial warfare 'neither the European nor the American armies that used the machine gun […] developed a real understanding of what it would mean when two modern armies met' (Gray 1997: 126). What Graham and Judith told me echoes this: the Vickers machine gun went from being unappreciated to becoming 'The Grand Old Lady of No Man's Land' by the

end of the war. It is now impossible to think of WWI without thinking of the grand-scale use of the machine gun.

When WWI broke out there were no separate machine gun companies, each battalion only had two machine guns among them. It was, as Fussell describes it, a time when '[t]he word *machine* was not yet invariably coupled with the word *gun*' (1979: 24; original emphasis). As the war progressed it became clear that many more machine guns were needed and the MGC was established in 1915, eventually becoming the largest fighting regiment in WWI. Various branches of the MGC were established and altered throughout the war. One such example is the MGC (Motors), which consisted of Vickers machine guns mounted on motorcycles. The unit was later absorbed into the Tank Corps/Royal Tank Regiment (RTR). The MGC was only in existence for seven years but its influence was significant. As explained to me by Graham, each brigade (consisting of four infantry battalions of a thousand infantry soldiers) would have one machine gun company, and one machine gun company comprised about a hundred and thirty men, with sixteen machine guns.

The machine gun is ubiquitous in representations of WWI; from its unique sound to the silence it leaves behind, to its risks and its effects, it is an ever-present part of books, film, and other cultural expressions. In WWI literature written by the soldiers and veterans of the war they appear as disembodied sounds, carnage without clear origin, and inspire emotions (such as fear) which are viscerally felt. The machine gun is one of the most prominent (textual) voices partaking in the telling of the war. What does this voice sound like? What does it do? —Both in the corpus and for my interlocutors?

In *Under Fire*, Barbusse describes a bombardment in the early stages of the war. The soldiers attempt to decipher the information gleaned from the sounds the various missiles make, when one specific sound catches their attention:

A dull crackle makes itself audible amidst the babel of noise. That slow rattle is of all the sounds of war the one that most quickens the heart.

'The coffee-mill! [note 1] One of ours, listen. The shots come regularly, while the Boches' haven't got the same length of time between the shots; they go crack--crack-crack-crack--crack-crack--crack—'

'Don't cod yourself, crack-pate; it isn't an unsewing-machine at all; it's a

motor-cycle on the road to 31 dugout, away yonder'. (2016: 232-233)

It is with a footnote that the following is pointed out by the translator: '[note 1] Military

slang for machine-gun—Tr.' (Barbusse 2016: 233). [44] In *Under Fire* the machine gun is named

directly twenty-two times but is actually mentioned more often. Soldiers' language was full

of slang, on top of which we have to contend with the lyrical style and stylistic choices of

authors such as Barbusse. In *Under Fire* the slang plays with different mechanic metaphors

like this. The note clarifies the use of 'coffee-mill', an interesting choice by the translator as

'unsewing-machine' does not have a footnote but is not necessarily clearer (although

perhaps it has not as clearly been recorded as soldiers' slang).[45] Although the 1-3-2-1

rhythm is retained, Barbusse's text is much more onomatopoeic in the original French than

the translation in this scene. What is '[a] dull crackle' (2016: 233) in *Under Fire* is '[u]n tic-tac

mat' in *Le Feu* (1965: 270). The terms '[l]e moulin à café' and 'la machine à découdre' (ibid)

are more directly translated. Out of all the sounds and sprays of rubble and earth that

precede the entry of the would-be machine gun, that of the machine gun is isolated as

doing something more than the rest: it 'is of all the sounds of war the one that most

quickens the heart' (Barbusse 2016: 233). The fear and stress that lies in the quickening of

the heart is brought to the surface when the men think they distinguish the sound of the

gun. Barbusse describes the coffee mill and the unsewing-machine in a situation where it is

doubly harmless (they think it is one of their own guns and it turns out to be a motorcycle),

but the machine gun is such a threat that the sonic suggestion is enough to scare them.

The above quotation is part of the description of a bombardment. It is a scene of

extreme distress in which the soldiers push themselves into the earth to remain alive, what

is described can be read as simultaneously exhilarating and scary, but other emotions creep

in as the men become more experienced. At the start of the bombardment the narrator

points out:

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[44] The German machine gun opposing the French is not a Vickers (which was British), but probably an MG
08/15. It was an adaptation of the Maxim machine gun, the first fully automatic machine gun, mostly
associated with 'The Scramble for Africa'.

[45] The article 'Trench Talk' in *Everybody's Magazine* from 1918 mentions the slang 'coffee mill' (n.p.).

We disdain the 77 mm. shrapnel, in spite of the fact that Blesbois was killed by one of them three days ago. They nearly always burst too high. Barque explains it to us, although we know it well: 'Your chamber-pot protects one's nut well enough against the bullets. So they can destroy your shoulder and damn well knock you down, but they don't spread you about.' […] (Barbusse 2016: 231)

Performance of both men and weapons is valued, even if this is at their disadvantage and can cause their own death. The coffee-mill evokes a 'grinding', especially considering that the mechanism of one was essentially that of a meat mincer. 'Unsewing-machine' similarly rings painful, carrying in it a reference to the way it kills—what it does to the soldier's body beyond killing it. 'En découdre avec quelqu'un' means to fight someone or 'to have it out', which might hint at an additional ironic play on words in addition the machine gun sound. By referencing the machine and verbally connecting its qualities to everyday objects and mechanisms, the reader is given a disruptive description which brings the way in which the human body can be undone to the forefront while stopping short of describing it (in these instances).

In *Machine Gunner 1914-1918: Personal Experiences of the Machine Gun Corps* (1973), WWI veteran machine gunner (and one of the founding members of the MGC/OCA) C.E. Crutchley suggests that '[t]here are, too, the records of the missing, whose last history is unknown beyond the tale of the steady staccato of their guns when everyone else had retired' (17). While endangering the lives of the infantrymen, the machine gun and its sounds also denote a presence—of both the materiel and the people that man it. For the machine gunners, their presence on the battlefield was one with the presence of the machine gun itself. On that other hand, the machine gun would be manned by men just like themselves, and as such a dangerous entity on the battlefield; moreover, they also formed one of its prime targets. In the introduction of *Machine Gunner 1914-1918* Crutchley narrates it as follows: 'The story of the Machine Gun Corps is a record of front-line soldiers, of those who accompanied the first wave of every assault and who remained to cover every retirement' (1973: 16). The use of the word 'record' is significant here. A recording suggests something objective, which can possibly be archived and stored, and in this case, which can tell us something about a specific corps the same way official military histories can. This is notable because Crutchley's book collects writing from MGC men, giving insights into the

corps' different theatres of war during WWI through personal and oral histories. The MGC has published and later reissued Crutchley's *Machine Gunner 1914-1918*. In a way, the entire book is also an act of remembrance. An act which is underscored by the fact that the MGC does not have an official military history published (see Chapter I), but it does have Crutchley's account. And in the foreword, Crutchley states:

> This book is not intended to glorify war—but to pass on the spirit and message of REMEMBRANCE in the hope that by so doing, it may help to point the way along the road to future world peace, more vital in this atomic age than ever before. (1973: 11, original emphasis)

The MGC, and the men's configuration around the gun show a particular kind of interaction between men and machine, who are fitted around it like cogs in a machine. The notion that soldiers within any military are essentially small elements in a larger structure, and that that structure is in itself a machine, is a notion which can be traced to (modern) scholarship on the Ancient Roman military. Analyses show the strength that was found in superior weaponry in combination with formation and strategy, leading to many a victory and control over huge swatches of land (see Keegan 1993; McNab 2010). As addressed in the Introduction, the focus on the tragic over the heroic in the modern war literature that was heralded by WWI (Coker 2014: 3), is clearly present for Crutchley. These 'ordinary soldiers' as they are shown in his work and in the texts of my corpus are the ancestors of many people in the U.K. and they stories bear an entirely different weight and importance to them and their lives. In the accounts directly after the war, loss and grief have the focus, but as time passes, as Judith has pointed out about the MGC, with distance an increased interest in the gun seems to arise. Additionally, learning about the machine gun and the MGC brings them closer to knowing what this ancestor's wartime was like, and they are ultimately the focus of their remembrance. As Judith says: 'I'm not really that interested in the equipment and the uniforms, but I like the stories like my own grandfather, I like the stories of real people' (see Chapter I).

The machine gun is one of the voices which tells the story of the war as it was for the 'real people' Judith identifies, but the materiality of the gun plays a significant role here as well. As the six roles of the machine gunners at the opening of this chapter already

suggested, within the constraints of the military, that materiality organised the men and their everyday (human and nonhuman) interactions. The consequences of which I will address in the next section.

Cogs in The Machine

There are several elements to the military that foster the notion of machine-like uniformity. They range from uniforms and standard gear—including regulations about haircuts—to military training, discipline, and strict hierarchy, all structuring military life. Chris Hables Gray (1989) points out that this is explicit military practice in order 'to make them [soldiers] interchangeable and mold [*sic*] them into a single unit of fighting force' (55). However, author and WWI veteran Henry Williamson reveals something about this element of discipline within the MGC through his novel *Love and the Loveless* (1958), where it is noted that machine gunners were undisciplined because they were trained as specialists rather than soldiers (Williamson 20004: 172). It would suggest there is some individuality encapsulated in being specialised. Judith has pointed out on several occasions that the MGC was a section of the British military where one did not end up through geography (in your regional section), but through skill. MGC men were pulled from other regiments when they showed themselves to have certain skills, such as marksmanship. From there on they were not only transferred but also received specialist training in the UK before being deployed at the front. The MGC training camps were established in Wisques in France and at Belton Park in Grantham, Lincolnshire, and the MGC/OCA holds an annual service in honour of the MGC men in Grantham.

When it comes to the narratives of the WWI veteran authors, that sense of being 'one of many' is present in a myriad of ways, not just in the negative ('cannon fodder'). While there is a lot of confusion and panic present in the combat scenes in Remarque's *All Quiet*, there are moments when military precision comes into play, and it becomes clear how the units must tactically work together, even with something as seemingly straightforward as holding off an attack:

> Suddenly the nearer explosions cease. The shelling continues but it has lifted and
> falls behind us, our trench is free. We seize the hand-grenades, pitch them out in

front of the dug-out and jump after them. The bombardment has stopped and a heavy barrage now falls behind us.

The attack has come.

No one would believe that in this howling waste there could still be men; but steel helmets now appear on all sides out of the trench, and fifty yards from us a machine-gun is already in position and barking.

The wire entanglements are torn to pieces. Yet they offer some obstacle. We see the storm-troops coming. Our artillery opens fire. Machine guns rattle, rifles crack. The charge works its way across. Haie and Kropp begin with the hand-grenades. They throw as fast as they can, others pass them, the handles with the strings already pulled. Haie throws seventy-five yards, Kropp sixty, it has been measured, the distance is important. The enemy as they run cannot do much before they are within forty yards. (Remarque 1970: 98-9)

The soldiers must be able to perform every step of the counterattack meticulously despite being under siege. As the narrator later points out: 'If we were not automata at that moment we would continue lying there, exhausted, and without will' (Remarque 1970: 101). This sense of being an automaton is closely tied to training and discipline, referring to the mechanical element of their actions and movements—their lives in that moment—as well as the ability to continue on when ordered to. They are coupled together with the mechanics of the weapons and they are weapons themselves in that sense.

In configurations such as the six men that man a machine gun, but also in the 'smaller' pairing of individual soldiers and their weapons, the human/organic is paired with the mechanical/constructed. In the case of the Machine Gun Corps, the six men of the machine gun are moulded together by the weapon. Training ensured that they would be able to man it, but the interactions between the men could only have been scripted to a certain extent (orders and directions). They must have been able to rely on each other entirely and swiftly be able to shift if one of them was hit and another had to take his place. While the same information is shared knowledge among these six men, the men of the MGC are decidedly embodied—their bodies are to carry out the main function of the weapon. There is no way around the human component even now, and not in WWI. But what to make of this desire for (military) disembodiment?

The military desire for human-machine couplings and 'automata' leads us to posthumanism. Posthumanism as a school of thought has two main ways in which the 'post' in 'posthuman' is considered: as moving beyond the human being/form or as moving beyond humanism, going beyond the notion of the (anthropocentric) humanist subject which has been prevalent in the west since the Enlightenment (Herbrechter 2013: 7). In *The Posthuman* (2013) Rosi Braidotti points out that 'the posthuman condition introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet' (2). According to Braidotti the 'posthumanist perspective' is rooted in the assumption of the ongoing historical decline of Humanism, but rather than lingering on the 'rhetoric of the crisis of Man' it explores alternatives, working towards alternative ways of conceptualizing the human (subject) (2013: 37). The Western conceptualisation of the human subject has been much debated in posthumanist thought, as it challenges the centrality of subjectivity and consciousness in its worldview. Katherine Hayles points out in *How We Became Posthuman* (1995) that in this debate, there is a real preoccupation with the notion that our bodies and consciousness can be separated or are indeed already separate. This is most tangible in the fantasy that humans might be able to achieve immortality through downloading their consciousness into a computer, thus living forever as disembodied consciousness. Hayles asks how in this narrative of immortality, the obvious connection of mind to body—embodiment—is lost (1995 1). To Hayles, the fantasy of disconnecting the human embodiment and placing the locust of consciousness fully in the mind (which is then transposable from the body), shows the underlying assumption that information is the essential component of human consciousness and subjectivity. After all, it is the body which is ultimately discarded in this fantasy. Human subjectivity, Hayles argues, has been equated with intelligence—*information*.[46] Notably this comes across hurdles when we consider our positionality, how we interact and are interacted with in the world because of 'who we are' physically (explored in Chapter II; see Khosravi 2016). Instead, it fully accepts the notion that our 'essence' exists, or can exist, independently from our bodies. This moves into the territory of transhumanism in its efforts to move beyond the human altogether—and which

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[46] Hayles places its point of origin of this construction of subjectivity in WWII, with the dawn of cybernetics (ix), and Allan Turning's 'Turing Test', which can be seen as a vision of disembodied intelligence—a vision which one of the defining characteristics of the posthuman (1995: 1; 4).

considers this a positive development (Herbrechter viii). By transhumanist associations it has been described as the legitimate desire to move 'beyond the human condition' via technoscientific means (Scianca n.p.). As Carey Wolfe points out in *What is Posthumanism*? (2009) this desire to transcend the human form can be interpreted as a continuation of humanist thought with its ideals of taking control of one's destiny, perfectibility, rationality, and agency (xiii; see Scianca n.p.). In the context of this project these complex challenges regarding the human and the humanist project can perhaps be best summarised in the rhetorical question Haraway poses in 'Cyborgs and Symbionts' (1995): 'Most Western narratives of humanism and technology require each other constitutively: How else could man make himself?' (xv). The machine gun needs the soldiers manning it, and the soldiers are machine gunners by virtue of their function around the machine gun.

This primacy of the machine over the human parts leads us to cyborg theory, a strand of posthuman theory which focuses on the technological enhancements which are paired with humans, and actively seeks to unite these elements of the human/organic with the mechanical/constructed. The word 'cyborg' is a shorthand for 'cybernetic organism'. Theorised as 'self-regulating man-machine systems' as a way in which humans could survive during space travel (Clynes and Kine 1960: 30). In *Future War* (2015) Christopher Coker points out that posthumanist thought has looked at the possibilities of cyborg theory as existential issues (xiii), but in military practice they are decidedly instrumental, aiming at the creation of ever better weapons. These efforts and considerations all engage with cyborg theory, even when they are practical in nature. In her seminal essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' (1991), Haraway defines the cyborg as follows: 'A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction' (291).[47] Haraway has received significant criticism for her definition of the cyborg, as it is entirely theoretical and does not take into account the lived realities of people who are, by that definition, cyborgs due to disability (see Weise 2018). However, her definition is fruitful here, as she specifically points to the social construction of the cyborg. Posthumanism, like cyborg theory and transhumanism, are all schools of thought which engage with the question what we

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[47] Bionics and cybernetics are different in that bionics refer to artificial constructs which behave according to organic laws (sonar and radar are examples).

consider to be human. Technological developments and posthumanist thought exist side by side, they influence one-another, and shape the way we perceive these issues of humanity and humanism (Ostendorf 2016: 14-15).

'Weapons' is not limited to the guns and ammunition but includes soldiers and soldier-machine couplings. For such efforts, the human is not the starting point, nor are they the focus: the weapon is. The military aim is to integrate people with these weapons and weapons systems rather than the other way around (Ostendorf 2016: 27). Chris Hables Gray points out in *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (1997), that in its present-day incarnation the soldier is not just influenced by the weapons used; now he or she is (re)constructed and (re)programmed to fit integrally into weapon *systems*' (195, original emphasis). This is a shift, the start of which can be seen in the sociality of the machine gun and the way it organises the machine gunners around its functionality. Gray continues: 'The basic currency of war, the human body, is the site of these modifications, whether it is of the "wetware" (the mind and hormones), the "software" (habits, skills, disciplines), or the "hardware" (the physical body)' (1997: 195-6). The human soldier is seen as limited in many ways. Humans need food and sleep, will get tired and scared. Basic training, punishments, and other elements of the military structure are to ensure soldiers follow orders while simultaneously functioning at the top of their abilities. The distribution of different drugs in war, ranging from alcohol and caffeine to cocaine (WWI) and amphetamines (WWII and Vietnam), are part of such efforts to influence the human performance. The desired integration between machine and soldier is primarily functional and ends up looking very specific.

In the case of the MGC men, Crutchley provides many insights into the experience of these early human-machine pairings. His *Machine Gunner 1914-1918* is an assemblage of first-person narratives, including Crutchley's own. He traces and reproduces the experiences of machine gunners from the first few in 1913 to the armistice, listing over forty MGC contributors. One of the early recruits describes his machine gun training when he became a reserve in the section (it was not yet a company) shortly after the outbreak of the war:

> After battalion parades, many hours were devoted to learning how to rectify gun
> stoppages, how to fill ammunition belts, how to strip and re-assemble the guns, and
> their parts. We also did overtime, endeavouring to clip seconds off the average time

for the various gun-drill movements. Morse code and semaphore signalling were also included in the curriculum. (1973: 20)

It is such day-to-day elements of the machine gunners' lives which interest the MGC/OCA, and shows how the men were readied for the war ahead. The military is a particularly fertile ground for transhuman efforts to move beyond human limitations, in efforts to create ever-more effective soldier-machine combinations. While we might now be able to conceive of exoskeletons and unmanned robots, these are developments which find their predecessors in the use of ever more lethal machines and weapons—the move from rifles to machine gun is a leap towards human-machine pairings in this regard. The machine gun introduced a more effective weapon; more bullets could be shot faster, even when considering one needed not one but six men to man it, in a set pattern. The Vickers machine gun was a particularly reliable mechanical system, making it possible to mount on a plane where it could shoot between the propellers, but one still needed soldiers to fire it.

In *Storm of Steel*, Jünger talks specifically of 'the modern warrior' (2004: 392), and describes both meeting the soldier he considers to be such a new soldier, and how he became that way:

He was the first German soldier I saw in a steel helmet, and he straightaway struck me as the denizen of a new and far harsher world. Sitting next to him in the roadside ditch, I questioned him avidly about the state of the position, and got from him a grey tale of days hunkered in craters, with no outside contact or communications lines, of incessant attacks, fields of corpses and crazy thirst, of the wounded left to die, and more of the same. The impassive features under the rim of the steel helmet and the monotonous voice accompanied by the noise of the battle made a ghostly impression on us. A few days had put their stamp on the runner, who was to escort us into the realm of flame, setting him inexpressibly apart from us.
"If a man falls, he's left to lie. No one can help. No one knows if he'll return alive. Every day we're attacked, but they won't get through. Everyone knows this is about life and death."
Nothing was left in this voice but equanimity, apathy; fire had burned everything else out of it. It's men like that that you need for fighting.' (2004: 93-4)

Here too, as with Remarque, there is a sense of the men being like automata. The steel helmets that were not yet issued at the beginning of the war in 1914, and which, in the face of the artillery that was used, turned out to be so very necessary, is the first marker of this more modern, mechanised soldier. The soldier speaks from under the steel rim but does not seem to do so as an emotional human being, but, numbed by warfare, he has become the kind of steel-helmeted soldier which is needed for fighting this new war. There is no heroism in these scenes, and the soldier with the steel helmet is clearly only one small element in a larger whole. Despite what he has seen and experienced, he is only 'a runner' with a message for Jünger's section. The way the wounded must be left; 'If a man falls, he's left to lie. No one can help,' shows their replaceable nature. Their abilities and training might set them apart from civilians, but they are only cogs in a larger machine. The men are grievable to each other, but within the larger structure of the military at war they are less so, and seen as a collective body, from which (replaceable) parts might fall. As one of Barbusse's soldiers poses: 'It is we who are the material of war' (2016: 370).

As the machine gun is one of the voices which tells of WWI, the human and machine components which construct this weapon must be considered in its various guises—and there is another angle from which the machinic quality of the soldiers becomes apparent. On both sides of WWI there were colonial troops from countries such as Senegal, the West Indies, and India fighting in war between European nations/empires. In *Dark Trophies: Hunting and the Enemy Body in Modern War* (2014) Simon Harrison points out that in Europe (and by extension, the U.S., as a former European colony), there is historically a different treatment reserved for the (dead) bodies of those that we consider to be the 'same race' and those that are 'other'. Thus, when it comes to soldiers who are considered to be of the same race, while still being the enemy, he says that '[t]hese co-racial enemies may certainly be fought and killed in battle, but after death it seems their bodies become inviolable' (Harrison 30). In a constellation where the people from the colonies of an empire are so 'othered' that they were not seen as fully human, the Black and Asian troops ended up stuck somewhere between 'other' and 'on our side', facing prejudice despite being part of the same military. Within the colonial system felling 'savages' was considered a feat of civilization, while that same system used those same 'savage' people to fight on their side in WWI. The colonial troops are as much separated in literature. For example, in Barbusse's

Under Fire there is a scene where a platoon of Senegalese soldiers (under the French flag) marches by. While they are initially described in ways which point to physical difference, the description soon turns to the question of the machine and the human:

> All the same, these Africans seem jolly and in high spirits. They are going, of course, to the first line. That is their place, and their passing is the sign of an imminent attack. They are made for the offensive.
>
> 'Those and the 75 gun we can take our hats off to. They're everywhere sent ahead at big moments, the Moroccan Division.'
>
> 'They can't quite fit in with us. They go too fast—and there's no way of stopping them.' […]
>
> We talk over the characteristics of these Africans; their ferocity in attack, their devouring passion to be in with the bayonet, their predilection for 'no quarter.' […]
>
> 'No doubt they're a different race from us, with their tent-cloth skin,' Barque confesses, though he does not know himself what 'cold feet' are. 'It worries them to rest, you know; they only live for the minute when the officer puts his watch back in his pocket and says, "Off you go!"'
>
> 'In fact, they're real soldiers.'
>
> 'We are not soldiers,' says big Lamuse, 'we're men.' (2016: 52-3)

The men of the squad do not oppose themselves to the Senegalese directly, instead they place what they perceive to be the essence of the soldier between them, and by these means they distinguish themselves as different from these African men. The only time the Senegalese men themselves are voiced, it is in disjointed French sentences and exclamations which support this view. Interestingly, the division between soldiers and civilians is constantly highlighted by Barbusse in *Under Fire*, but the arrival of the Senegalese brings a third category. Views of colonialism and savages end up overlapping with ideas of machines and soldiers.

As the discussion between the men in the narrative shows, the African soldiers are not *more* than soldiers, that is a privilege reserved for the men in the titular squad, but they are 'something other'. Not only are the Senegalese troops soldiers, to the eyes of the French troops they are born to be—in the same sense that machines are made. This machine-like

comparison is most felt in the remark that '"They can't quite fit in with us. They go too fast--and there's no way of stopping them."' This is opposed to the French soldiers: '"We are not soldiers," says big Lamuse, "we're men."' (2016: 53). Their conclusion suggests that they consider 'men', not soldiers the superior form of being (even though all of them are soldiers; conscripted, coerced, professional or otherwise). The war-aptness of the Senegalese does not stem from them becoming more-than-human (or post-human), but from being 'primitive'. The only difference is their 'race', which makes them perfect for use in the war, where they 'belong' at the front line, but without being granted the human considerations that trouble the French soldiers. The narrative sets out to show the soldiers in the squad are different and not cannon fodder but living, grievable people, in Butler's terms, while the colonial soldiers are denied the same. Instead, they are discussed as if they are weapons, no different from the exploding .77 shells or .75 guns. Meanwhile, when it concerns the Europeans, the 'perfect soldiers' are placed ahead of the rest—the way Jünger describes the perfect, emotionless soldier.

This tension between the (perfect) soldier and the weapon that soldier is integrated with brings into focus the anxieties that existed around the machine, the human and colonial notions of race while white European and colonial troops fought each other and their modern weapons in WWI. Within this posthumanist constellation, the machine gun continues to stand out. The soldiers are not only coupled with the machine gun, and the following section will discuss how the machine gun also speaks to them as they face it on the battlefield.

The Voice of the Machine Gun

In the five novels of my primary corpus there are numerous mentions of machine guns and the different parts they play in the soldiers' lives—both as an enemy weapon and one of their own. In these texts, machine guns are made known primarily through sound and the devastating effect they have on the soldiers' bodies and mental state. When Blunden describes the repetitive sound of the machine guns in *Undertones of War*, '[t]he machine-guns there thudded' (18) and 'a machine-gun began pecking at the wood' (239): an indication of Blunden's preference for likening the sounds of the battlefield to those of

nature. As mentioned, Barbusse's *Under Fire* uses both slang and onomatopoeic constructions to reference 'the crackle of a machine-gun' (276). In Remarque's *All Quiet*, 'the machine-guns rattle' throughout the text (1970: 55; 99; 183; 184; 185), and at one point 'the tack-tack of machine-guns breaks out' (ibid: 85). In Jünger's *Storm of Steel,* it is 'a stuttering swathe of machine-gun fire' (2003: 23) and 'Overhead the machine-guns of the air squadrons pattered away' (ibid: 33). And here, too: 'If the artillery was silent for any time, you could hear the tactactac of machine-guns' (ibid: 273). The repetitious—mechanical—sound of the machine guns renders them recognisable to the experience-trained soldiers. The 'tack-tack' and 'tactactac' is a distinctive sound in these two texts. Both are translated from the German where it is originally written as 'das Tacktack' (Remarque 1971: 71) in *Im Westen* and 'das Tacken' (Jünger 2008: 297) in *In Stahlgewittern*. The translation of a verb—*tacken*—which does not exist in English, becomes more onomatopoeic in the English translation than it is in Jünger's original. There appears to be a certain universality yet specificity to the sound of the machine gun among that of other weapons. The sounds of the weapons are recognised by troops, but the rhythmicality of the machine gun is the only one which is specified in the writing in such similar terms across national and linguistic boundaries. These sounds are not identical, and neither are their translations, but the rhythmic evocations and particular analogies bring specific sounds to the mind of the reader, while the other sounds, many different whistles, and high explosions often lack that same specificity.

In *Undertones of War* something else happens to the way the machine guns are narrated: they become more than a source of repetitious sound. The machine gun becomes almost whimsical alongside deadly when it is described that an action takes place with the 'machine gun playing' (1982: 193). Later in the narrative 'the enemy's machine-guns played' (ibid: 226), and they are found to do so again when: 'The machine-gun seemed to play particularly on a corner of Gauche Wood called Gun Post' (ibid: 238). On three occasions in *Undertones of War* the machine gun is playing or being played by the enemy. The implication is that of a playing game or of playing music, the latter of which, considering the tonal element of the machine gun sounds, is the most likely reference in this context. In other places in the text, the machine guns become practically anthropomorphised as 'machine-guns were ever snarling at us', and we hear 'the innumerable high voices of machine-guns like the spirits of madness in alarm shrilling above the clashing tides of

explosion' (ibid: 116; 61). In *All Quiet*, in several instances, the machine gun 'barks' (1970: 99; 102); in German it '[l]osbellt' ('*starts barking*') and 'kläft' ('*barks*') (1971: 83; 86). The machine gun barks in *Under Fire* as well, when some soldiers yell that the machine guns which were taken over no longer bark: '"The machine-gun's taken by the 7th," they shout, "it won't bark any more. It was a mad devil—filthy beast! Filthy beast!"' (Barbusse 2016: 283). 'A n' gueul'ra plus' (1965: 324). Such moves from sound to animalistic barks and snarls, to screams and to voice show a crossover between the mechanic and animalistic—to being called 'beasts'. Even Crutchley talks about a 'machine-gun barking' in his narrative (1973: 66).

In the scene in *Under Fire* where the 'crackle of a machine-gun' is heard, a similar shift of machine gun voice/voicing takes place, but takes the next step to being anthropomorphised:

> It is just at the moment when he rejoins us that we hear in front of us, coming from a sort of ground swelling, the crackle of a machine-gun. It is a moment of agony— more serious even than when we were passing through the flaming earthquake of the barrage. That familiar voice speaks to us across the plain, sharp and horrible. (2016: 276)

This takes place in the chapter from which *Under Fire* lends its title. There is a clear contrast between sounds and actions of the machine gun, and of the artillery barrage. The machine gun does not just have a distinct and recognisable sound, but a distinct and recognisable voice—a voice that speaks to the soldiers. It is initially felt in as a 'ground swelling', the waves of sound advancing towards the soldiers. The men have just survived an assault with different weapons, the 'flaming earthquake of the barrage' where top became indistinguishable from bottom. The chapter from *Under Fire* has so far been a description of an attack—a situation which is described by one of the men as if 'under a curse' before the attack has even started (Barbusse 2016: 249). The men of the company have suffered the losses of comrades and are being kept in the trenches past the usual four days (after which they would normally be relieved), causing them to suspect an impending attack. Among them is one of six brothers; he is the only one of them who is still alive. When the attack comes it is an all-encompassing fire and violence 'a frightful curtain which divides us from

the world, which divides us from the past and from the future' (ibid: 271). And yet, the sound of the machine gun fire advancing brings them more agony. The 'sharp and horrible' voice of the machine gun is directly tied to the devastating effect the machine guns have on the soldiers' bodies—and it is one which the soldiers have come to recognise and fear.

In Blunden's *Undertones* the properties of man and machine shift completely. The weapons wielded by the men themselves become anthropomorphized; 'A strong group looked out on Canadian Orchard, with its naked historic trees: it was their habit to annoy the Germans opposite with a Lewis gun, and at their invitation I also caused their weapon to speak' (Blunden 1982: 29).[48] While being under attack the weaponry seems to be merely part of the landscape, while when it is in his own hands, the machine gun 'speaks'. The weapon ceases to be part of the landscape when Blunden is wielding it himself and becomes almost human, capable of speech and eliciting a response from the opponent. It establishes a rapport between the weapon and soldier, starting to complicate the confusion of his first interactions with the frontline. The narrator remains close to Blunden's point of view, and through the small instances that he relates, the outline of a greater war is sketched in sensory images that are interspersed with the landscape as it always was, giving us snapshots of the happenings in wartime. As Blunden himself points out at that first introduction: 'As yet my notion of modern war was infinitesimal' (1982: 31).

Even in *Storm of Steel*, which is decidedly less war-weary than other texts of the time and subject, there is a fear of, and even respect for the machine gun. Even when it is not sounding, the machine gun is a feared element of trench warfare. As Jünger's text reads: 'The thought: "Now they're going to bring up a machine-gun" gave me a bad taste in my mouth. The others entertained similar fears' (Jünger 2004: 73). It is something which all soldiers have come to fear, the anticipation alive before the shots are even being fired. In these instances, the machine gunners recede into the background of the narratives and are completely eclipsed by the gun and its effects, as if the machine guns were not manned but acted independently. In *All Quiet* there is an instance following a successful counterattack where the soldiers suddenly reach the enemy line: 'We are so close on the heels of our retreating enemies that we reach it almost at the same time as they. In this way we suffer

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[48] The Lewis gun is a WWI-era light machine gun that was mass-produced in the United Kingdom, and widely used by troops of the British Empire during the war (it was in use until the Korean War).

few casualties' (1970: 102).[49] At this close range, the enemy's machine gun 'barks' at them, causing casualties but also allowing for a moment of retaliation against one machine gunner:

> A machine-gun barks, but is silenced with a bomb. Nevertheless, the couple of seconds has sufficed to give us five stomach wounds. With the butt of his rifle Kat smashes to pulp the face of one of the unwounded machine-gunners. (ibid: 102-3)

The silencing of the barking machine gun with the impact of a bomb is a reminder of the risks the machine gunners faced due to the threat they posed to their enemy. While it seemed to have its own agency and almost to be acting independently in the attack, this dynamic is quickly flipped around by what follows. Before he was part of the machine gun, now the machine gunner is dehumanised through the violence of Kat's action. It is a rare moment when the opposing armies fight from the same position at close range; although it does happen, the majority of the combat scenes in my primary corpus show modern warfare as taking place in individual trenches suffering larger-than-life assaults; man against the violence of modern machines. The scene in the French trenches continues: 'We bayonet the others before they have time to get out their bombs. Then thirstily we drink the water they have for cooling the gun' (ibid: 103). 'The others' in this context are most likely the remaining of the machine gun crew. What also becomes apparent in these instances, is that the machine gun kills indiscriminately but that the deaths are related in singular ways, often relating them to familiar objects and sounds, in a way returning them to the quotidian.

In the French context it might not have been exactly six people, as they used a Hotchkiss machine gun which could be operated by three men. However, considering Judith and Graham's explanation of the six men operating the Vickers machine gun, there might have been more than three people manning French machine guns, taking aim or signalling, and so on. Regardless, this brutal treatment could be expected from the enemy by any machine gun corps from either side and any country; the machine gun comes forward as the most feared and devastating weapon on the battlefield, and its operators would be viewed

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[49] Remarque is speaking of the French line, while the enemy line from Barbusse's point of view is the German line.

as a part/extension of that machinery of war. Mercy turns out to be virtually non-existent in the heat of battle.[50] While in action the machine gun seems to have its own agency. But once the soldiers manage to enter the enemy trenches and they are in proximity (the opposite of the machine gun's long range) they are able to take control of the gun and kill those that man it. Killing the individual soldiers or taking them out with a bomb, both have the same goal and effect: silencing the machine gun.

The dehumanisation of the soldier, or soldier-machine, thus takes on different guises. Either he is blended together with the machine as the one operating it and there is no specific mention of him outside of the machine, rather than the desired transhuman evolution, he is *de*humanised through a racial reading of his person, in which he is only a weapon the way white soldiers could never be, or he is so used to—and blunted by—the experience of warfare that he is like an automaton, the perfect soldier. In *Male Fantasies* (1989), an analysis of the diaries of Freikorps men in the interwar years, sociologist Klaus Theweleit theorised that the new 'man of steel' that came to be through WWI's mechanical warfare, has a physique which has been mechanised, and his body armour has effectively displaced his psyche (161-2).[51] Machine and body fuse together and as could be seen in Jüngers interaction with the perfect soldier, and as Theweleit phrases it: 'We are presented with a robot that can tell the time, find the North, stand his ground over a red-hot machine-gun, or cut wire without a sound' (162). The qualities Theweleit describes all rely on the machinic qualities of weapons (and thus of 'perfect' or 'good' soldiers) on the one hand, and the human (fallible, moral) qualities of the men who became soldiers through a war that called its people in as volunteers and conscripts.

The voice of the machine gun is one of the loudest voices in my corpus. What stands out when analysing the representation of the machine gun is the care which it is given. Death and killing are such an integral part of this literature, but there is real care present too—and not just for their comrades. This care is evident through the sounds, the telling slang, its effects and the affect it evokes; the way it works on and interpellates the machine gunners and its victims alike. Even the gun itself, while causing so much pain and misery, is

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[50] See Barbusse (2016: 102); several surrendering men get shot bluntly during their advance on the machine gun.
[51] The Freikorps were military volunteer units (or paramilitary) which effectively fought as mercenary forces for whoever hired them. Although Freikorpsmen came from different European countries, Theweleit's study concerns itself with more than 250 diaries of German Freikorpsmen (1989: ix).

given an almost reverential treatment—it is given space on the page as more than just a killing machine. All sides had machine guns and they relied on them as well as feared them. And while Blunden's disclaimer that warfare is impossible to convey to those who do not know it, and while reading will not give one intimate *experiential* knowledge of warfare, it certainly brings once closer to understanding.

The presence of the machine gun in my corpus and the MGC/OCA's engagement with the soldiers' accounts and the materiality of the gun of are both illustrative of the interplay between man and machine, between the corporeal and the material, who controls who (or what), and how agency takes shape in this context. In *Frames of War* (2009) Butler indicates that: 'persons use technological instruments, but instruments surely also use persons (position them, endow them with perspective, establish the trajectory of their action)' (xi). This approach of materiality deals with the modality seen in the machine gun in this chapter: as though it has agency and acts independently. The human-material (or rather, human-materiel) assemblage of which the machine gunners are a part of prompts us to rethink both the human and the material in war, the agency of weapons like the machine gun, and the associated diminished agency of the humans manning it. As Saunders points out: 'The First World War was recognized at the time as a war of matériel, or *Materialgeschlacht*. This fact alone invites an anthropological approach focussed on material culture' (2003: 2). While the sound of the machine gun brought fear to the soldiers in the corpus, this is not the case for the MGC/OCA. They have not taken over (nor are they performing) the fears of the time, despite aiming to get close to the lived experience of their ancestors. Instead, there is a real fascination for the machine gun as the object that might bring them closer to this experience. In *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998), anthropologist Alfred Gell discerns a structure between the artefact or 'Index', the originator or 'Artist', and the viewer or 'Recipient' (15; 27). The artefact, the artist, and the viewer—or reader—are connected through their interaction with the artifact (Index). Gell further 'identifies a fourth presence, that of the entity held to be depicted by the art-object (the 'Prototype')' (in Reed 2011: 25). Applying this to the context of my thesis, the Index can be various (use-)objects for OCA/MGC members, but specifically the Vickers machine gun is felt to hold some truth of what their ancestor's lives were like:

'[It] tells a story of the momentous experiences of its maker—whether a front line soldier, prisoner of war or civilian refugee. In WWI, these objects resonate with the terrors of endless bombardment, night raids, gas attacks, boredom and the bestial nature of trench life'. (Saunders 2003: 15)

Some MGC/OCA members own (Vickers) machine guns, and the OCA has organised a shooting event in the past, where all the members that so desired could shoot the gun. The bullet casings from her turn at this event are still lined up in the windowsill in Judith's home. The telling of the lives of the MGC men though the details of their lives, weapons, and death, lies enclosed in this materiality as much as it is present in the narratives I have explored in this chapter.

The engagement with the memory of the MGC men that the OCA has is also notable because it falls under post-memory in practice (see Löschnigg and Sokołowska-Paryz 2014), there are no more living WWI veterans among us, but the Association *was* started by MGC veterans, which means the group itself is older than most post-memory narratives. Many OCA members do have first-hand memories of conversations they had with the MGC veterans, but as people who do not have first-hand knowledge of the war, a lot of their information comes from research. The OCA members occupy a space between memory and post-memory, but as time goes on and the distance between the veterans and the (new) members becomes greater, they inevitably move more and more towards the latter. Wilson points out that surviving family members can detail the trauma of the past, essentially making it a contemporary phenomenon (2014: 48-9). This is something different from tying to recreate the trauma or to relive it in a way that is mediated by memory, documents, or other expressions of material culture. Rather than recreating, as is the case in a lot of post-memory film and literature (contemporary work about WWI), they are reliving these events (ibid: 48). Wilson points out that in terms of post-memory, '[m]edia representations of the battlefields do not create or manipulate these perceptions of suffering; they reflect the trauma that is already present within society which is used by contemporary populations to legitimise a sense of place and identity' (ibid: 50). The representations Wilson is talking about are mostly contemporary, but reiteration, the republishing and re-filming of 'classic' WWI texts that were written by veterans also play a part in this network. The story of Judith's grandfather points towards the trauma that is present in her family because of

WWI, and the narratives of the struggle and trauma that the soldiers endured only corroborate what is known to be true in her family. Indeed, the events of WWI are experienced and felt 'as a continuing disturbance' (ibid: 55), or 'ripple effect'. As explored in Chapter I, the end of the war is ever pushed outward, and the engagement with WWI its war dead is continually kept in the present. One of the areas where this is particularly poignant is on the former battlefields of WWI in France and Belgium. As the next chapter will examine, the continued disturbance of WWI persists in the (physical, literary, commemorative) landscape of war.

Chapter V: Configuring the Warscape

Driving Through the Somme

Before I moved to St Andrews, my mother and I decided to visit the former WWI battlefields in Belgium and Northern France. From the Netherlands it was a four-hour drive both ways, and we drove down on one long summer's day in 2017. During the centenary there were countless (photo) reportages with titles such as 'The Fading Battlefields of World War I' (*The Atlantic*) or 'Europe's Landscape Is Still Scarred by World War I' (*The Smithsonian Magazine*). These articles vastly overstate how war-scarred the former battlefields are in the present day. I overstated this myself, in my MA thesis, speaking of fields I had never seen (Ostendorf 2016). What I *had* seen were aerial pictures of the now grassy trenches, one of which was my desktop background (fig. 14).

Fig. 14. Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Monument in France. Picture by landscape photographer Michael St. Maur Sheil (2016)

As we drove through Flanders, I realised the landscape did not look as pictured above. Contrary to what I was made to believe, it just looked like fields. Farm fields with many, many cemeteries. We had set off for the Newfoundland Monument, where it would be possible to see the trenches, but there was an air show that day, and the events blocked the roads that led there. We did visit a museum in Albert, one of the important towns behind the lines for the Allies in WWI, and we stopped at several cemeteries and walked around the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme.[52] The enormous structure with the names of the missing was overwhelming and moving but what the trip taught me most of all was that Flanders was not visibly war scarred in the way I had thought—that turned out to be an act of conservation at a very specific location.

Later, when I was doing fieldwork, I visited the region again. As indicated previously, I went on a battlefield tour. Guide Paul Reed had invited me to go along to one of the battlefield tours he organises for Leger Holidays. Paul is a military historian. His interest in WWI stems from his family; both his grandfathers had fought in WWI and his grandma 'lost all her cousins but one'. He grew up with that knowledge and those stories. He has a wealth of stories, many of which he told during the tour. Most of the stories he told would tie into the places we were visiting or connected to family histories from people on the tour. Our itinerary was as follows:

Day 1
Travel to France

Day2
Peronne
Lochnagar Mine Crater
Newfoundland Park
Thiepval Memorial

Day 3
Tyne Cot Cemetery
Vancouver Corner
Brooding Soldier Memorial
Hooge (+Lunch)

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[52] Thiepval bears the names of 72.331 'missing' British and South African servicemen who died in the Battles of the Somme in WWI but have no known grave (*CWWC* n.p.).

Sanctuary Wood Trench Museum
Messimes Ridge
Last post at the Menin Gate

Day 4
Langemarck German Cemetery
Ploegsteert memorial
Travel back

It was the end of October and on the ferry to Calais there was hardly anyone without a red poppy on their clothes, and meanwhile there was a child making shooting noises at random passengers from behind a couch. Both tour guides said that they do these tours in the hope that people will become aware of the scale of the war, as well as the human aspect, focusing on the lives of ordinary people.

By taking these battlefield tours I am following in the footsteps of a tradition of visits and pilgrimages to the battlefields of the former Western Front that spans a century. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley note in *Dark Tourism* (2000) that '[v]isiting sites which could be said to be connected in some way to death (e.g., murder sites, death sites, battlefields, cemeteries, mausoleums, churchyards, the former homes of now-dead celebrities) is a significant part of tourist experiences in many societies' (4). This notion of 'dark tourism' or 'thanatourism' concerns the scholarship focussed on the growing 'tourist interest in recent death' that has come about in places like Cernobyl and the battlefields of Flanders (ibid: 3). In fact, Lennon and Foley suggest that WWI is a likely candidate for the earliest event which stimulated 'dark tourism' (ibid: 8). Amat, Fillippucci, and Savouret (2015) agree that in the case of Verdun, '[t]ravel to the battlefield began almost before the war was over by veterans, relatives and friends of combatants and those curious to see locations rendered famous by the unprecedented media coverage of the conflict' (55). These pilgrimages to the former battlefields have moulded and informed the description of thanatouristic sites, 'associated with the death of individuals or groups, mainly in circumstances which are associated with the violent and the untimely' as they are (Lennon and Foley 2000: 3).

When I went on these tours, I had no relatives to look for in the registers or on the monuments but was fascinated by this warzone lying underneath ploughed and green fields. Driving to Thiepval from the Netherlands with my mother meant passing the signs that marked the frontlines in different years, while the landscape betrayed nothing of these

battles or former front lines. Upon exiting the Thiepval memorial, the road on the ground reads 'KEEP RIGHT'; even without having read the many British names on the monument, this would have told me that its main visitors drive over from the UK. The story of Judith Lappin's grandfather (see Chapter I) points towards the trauma that is present in her family because of WWI, and the WWI narratives ranging from letters to novels, showing what the soldiers endured, only corroborates what is known to be true in her family. To Paul, the war was about the 'ordinary people' of WWI, and by this he explicitly did not mean only the soldiers, but also to the people they left behind. As Paul told me, '[t]he men would be dead and that would be that, but the women would have to reckon with that'. Indeed, the events of WWI are experienced and felt 'as a continuing disturbance' (Wilson 2014: 55)—or 'ripple effect' as Judith described it. As the other guide told us while we were driving through Flanders: 'They all have a story you see. Some you don't know, some you do, but they all have a story'. All the soldiers, but the people who were left behind, too. Who are these stories meant for? Do they belong to anyone? Commemoration practices have claimed these stories, the multitude of them, as part of a national narrative and the creation of a 'we'. Individual feelings about individual ancestors are shared by many and are transmorphed into communal feelings (see Ahmed 2013), and thus, as explicated, individual feelings about individual soldiers can be transmorphed into communal feelings about the nation and the 'we' that constitutes it.

While writing on his work with the Western Apache, anthropologist Keith Basso states in *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), that in that context, commemorative practices are an expression of a communal relationship to place (109). In the case of the WWI Flanders Fields, they are primarily an expression of connection between once-living and living people, and the battlefield has been absorbed into this as the (fighting- and) final resting place of those ancestors. The battlefield tours and the commonwealth gravestones say something about our relationship to the dead and to the land, but also present social structures between the living. *The Illustrated Michelin Guide to Verdun and the Battles for its Possession* (1919) points out that over the course of the years 1914-1918 the names of the places around and for which so many of their countrymen and allied forces had died 'had become terribly familiar to British readers' (n.p.). What Fussell states in relation to the veterans (of any war), seems to hold true for their relatives as well: 'Revisiting the battlefields in memory becomes as powerful a ritual obligation as visiting the cemeteries'

(1975: 327). We as present-day visitors to the Somme region cannot see the landscape as it was in 1919, only allude to it by using the words and images of others to overlay with our knowledge of these (past) warscapes. According to historian Pierre Nora (1989), '[w]e speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left' (7). Nora speaks of direct, first-hand memory of events, and this is what has disappeared where it concerns (certain) historical events. He continues: 'There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory' (ibid, original emphasis). Settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience, such as with WWI, are no longer present. Instead, the sites of memory function almost as an entryway into others' (communal) sites of memory. Is it the war which forges a connection between these layers of destruction, regeneration, and abstraction of the wartime landscape, or do landscapes such as that of Flanders bind the different stages of warfare together?

The landscape of war, or 'warscape', concerns a specific time and place when war-scaled fighting occurred in a landscape. But the moment of war can be 'accessed' through various elements: the landscape, ruins, bones, personal items, literature, letters, trench art, and so on. Some objects remain equally poignant throughout the years because they provide a 'touch of the real', thereby giving access to the space or 'contact zone' where the object was first conjured into existence; trench art, for example, remains unchanged and the pictures and texts of the time remain as it was upon its first publication (Greenblatt in Das 2005: 12; see Saunders 2003). Even when books are reprinted the content does not change. Shifts only occur in interpretation, translation or remastering/colouring of text and images. However, not everything 'keeps' in the same way, and some things cannot—or will not—be preserved the way literature or art can. The landscape of the Western Front is an example of this. The landscape as it was with its networks of trenches has faded away and been replaced either with the old structures or fields, or given new purposes. Towns such as the Belgian Ypres—shot to rubble—are now completely rebuilt, showing no sign of having been razed to the ground a century ago. When I do visit the Newfoundland Park, the trenches are clean and empty, and we peer over the edges as the guides point to various former battle sites and cemeteries in the distance. The pristine trenches come to mind when I later read Brigitte Dancel's research on how the WWI was taught (and commemorated) at primary schools in the Somme region immediately after WWI, shows that the war is effectively sanitised and reduced to a few armies and battles (2002: 22). The findings lead her to call

WWI a 'disembodied war' ('guerre désincarnée'), describing how information seems to have been lost, and specifically an understanding of the scale of the fighting and human injury and loss during in this war in their own backyards (ibid: 23). In this French primary school syllabus, as in my exam booklet in the Netherlands (see Chapter II), the aim seemed to be to integrate WWI into the narrative of European wars (ibid: 22). After the passing of time and the changes that were made, is it still possible for the landscape to function as such an 'entryway' into past events? In their storytelling, Paul and the other guide would facilitate this function. They kept using the present tense to talk about the evens in WWI and would say 'so, what is happening here…', when speaking about events which took place a hundred years ago as we were driving through fields and pastime frontlines. The immersion in the narrative helps to tell the story of the landscape and the people that were once in it.

Presently we are dealing with battlefields that have either disappeared from historical awareness altogether or have been carefully curated, as is the case in the North of France and parts of Belgium. Landscape theorist Annemarie Bucher points out that when it comes to past wars, oftentimes '[r]emaining structures and "objects" such as battlefields, front lines, walls or fortifications have been either transformed into heritage sites or closed off as prohibited zones' (Bucher 2016: 32). While some areas in Flanders are still prohibited because undetonated wartime explosives are present, there are trenches that are maintained, mowed, and reinforced to keep them 'for posterity', or at least for the tourists that still frequent the former battlefields. The booklet we are given during the tour is filled with bits of historical context and a single map. It is clear this is meant only as an accompaniment to the landscape we're driving through and the stories we are told. The information helps us 'read' the landscape by giving context, but the texture is given by the guides' storytelling. As we are driving on day two, Paul points at a lantern post and mentions: 'these holes, people will put ammunition they find in there, and then the county drives around and picks them up'. The first handful we pass are empty, but then we do see several rusty brown WWI shells stacked up in a post by the side of the road, and we keep seeing them throughout the week. Despite its seeming normalcy which I had not expected on that first trip with my mother, the landscape does keep eerily spilling forth WWI remnants.

On the tour we were told that for the ordinary soldier 'the elements were more your enemy than your enemy'. Matt Leonard (2012) emphasises that the Flanders we see now is

quite different from the frontline as it was in many respects, making it easy to forget and neglect the muddy, slippery state of the battlefield. The weather and muddy conditions of Flanders fields has been the subject of much veteran writing. The muddy shapelessness was disorienting from a visual and tactile perspective. In *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005), Santanu Das points out that '[h]uman geography is suddenly changed, a reassuring visual universe is replaced by a mysterious tactile one and human life is at risk' (Das 2005: 35). For example, Barbusse writes of 'mud-masses with broken stakes protruding from them', and 'slime-beds and puddles' (2016: 11)—he even speaks of a 'muddy sky' (17) and the apocalyptic scene at the end of the narrative is not the only time the soldiers find themselves covered in mud after rain. When Jünger describes getting back to a trench after fourteen days, it is only to find it bombarded and mud-logged with the dead still there: 'It had collapsed into a huge, mud-filled pit in which the occupants sloshed around miserably' (2003: 56). Or in one of his diary entries: 'Our trench is drowning, the morass is now up to our navels, it's desperate. On the right edge of our frontage, another corpse has begun to appear, so far just the legs' (Jünger 2003: 58-9). In his work on cartography and modern war, geographer Derek Gregory (2015) aims to counter the official 'optical-visual' cartography that was used during WWI with 'the muddy, mutilated and shell-torn slimescapes in which the infantry was immersed month after month' (91). Gregory explains the notion of 'corpography' as constructions of time and space that primarily rely on sound, smell, and touch (2015: 91). Over the course of life during trench warfare these senses 'were increasingly privileged in the construction of a profoundly haptic or somatic [corporal] geography' (ibid). Representations of such 'corpographies' thus do not chart the landscape exclusively by its visual markers, but by other means. The implication of these conditions is that senses other than the visual gained precedence as they became increasingly important for survival. Visual perception of the landscape was thus forced into a secondary position due to the new conditions that modern warfare imposed on its soldiers.

The landscape has known many different stages before and since the WWI raged through it. In the present day, these former battlefields with trenches and slime-filled holes (Das 2005: 36), are once again fields for farming, towns or have been turned into cemeteries and monuments. In this chapter I explore the notion of reading anew through the lens of the landscape as it relates to my interlocutors and myself. The landscape is both historical site and (re)imagined battlefield, and both of are returned to—physically and through the act of

reading. To address the (re)visiting and (re)reading landscape in the context of WWI I must first ask: how does a landscape (narratively) become a landscape of war?

Sounding Out the War(scape)

In the introduction to *The Anthropology of Landscape* (1995), Erich Hirsch points out that:

> The word landscape was introduced into the English language in the late sixteenth century as a technical term used by painters. It came from the Dutch *landschap* and was known for some time in English as 'landskip'. The painterly origin of the landscape concept is significant. What came to be seen as landscape was recognized as such because it reminded the viewer of a painted landscape, often of European origin. (2)

Considering this history of 'the landscape' it is worth noting that the region of Flanders, bordering on what was once the Netherlands, has exactly the landscape that made Dutch sixteenth-century painters famous. There is an abundance of *vergezichten; v*iews that allow you to look far into the horizon, and that are often filled with more cloud-filled sky than land. This way of perceiving the world was highlighted in the trenches. Fussell points out that in the trenches '[o]ne saw two things only: the walls of an unlocalized, undifferentiated earth, and the sky above' (1975: 51). In this war so many miles of trenches were dug on both sides that it would have been enough to circumvent the earth (Fussell 1975: 37), but this scale would never have been noticeable to any soldier on either side, caught in the trenches as they were. Fussell still mostly focusses on the visual aspect of trench warfare when he states that '[i]t was the sight of the sky, almost alone, that had the power to persuade a man that he was not already lost in a common grave' (ibid: 51).

This near-sightedness in the trenches came with its intensified version—the trenches at night. Due to the nature of trench warfare, particularly the risk of being visible and liable to get shot during daylight hours, most of the action within the trenches took place at night ('nocturnal duty'). In his examination of the senses in WWI literature, Das emphasises how, while in the trenches, the soldiers' eyes were 'open and disoriented in the night' (2005: 6).

They are left with their hearing and their hands and bodies, feeling their way around the trenches. What remains of the flat horizons of Flanders is a limited tunnel vision, revealing nothing but mud and (dark) sky, ultimately creating 'a landscape without shape' (Leonard 2012: 58). In his work on phonology in Umeda (spoken by the Umeda in Papua New Guinea) Gell (1995) suggests that 'in cultural/environmental contexts where a single sense modality [such as sight] is dominant,' language might be structured and articulated differently (20). As shown in the origin of the word and idea of 'landscape', sight is often considered the most prominent sense and means to relate to landscape with, in the tradition that produced the WWI veteran-writers of the western front. The fact that vision was subordinate to the other senses has found its way into the writing of war and warscape.

An approach focussed on material culture would point out that we might be able to find old trenches, artefacts, or even human remains, but what happened, what restricted their movement, what they heard, how they felt, etc. is only accessible with the help of specific artefacts and our imaginative capacities. Das favours a reading that moves beyond the reading of words, instead opting for 'a more active engagement with the material' (2017: 49). This approach has the advantage of shifting the focus of analysis. Rather than looking at a narrative of war (war-writing) as an existing construct, he favours the haptic:

> to *sense* life, as it were, while being alert to the traces of violence; to how in a fragmentary, tentative, hesitant way, a narrative is built up; to be alive to the role of affect in the relics and the 'reader.' (Das 2017: 50, original emphasis)

According to Das these non-textual sources 'point to the importance of relicts as zones of contact between warm life and historical violence, sacred sites where testimony is born' (2017: 49). This proposed plurality could offer a mode of analysis that to a larger extent incorporates both the map and the territory of (past) warscapes. The more active engagement with the material Das proposes is precisely what I have aspired to do through the fieldwork in this project. I have encountered the haptic, not as a direct experience of warfare, but through engaging with the 'contact zone' (as in thanatourism). It gives texture to the narratives and provides that 'touch of the real'; the text, while the same in content, has been reproduced, but, following Gell's categorisation (see Chapter IV), the landscape and objects in the MGC/OCA archive both are Indexes—they are the (art) object which

connects the MGC men to the MGC/OCA members who hold these objects or move through the former battlefields. They are the same thing the authors of these narratives saw and held or could have held—much like their characters could have. The works in my corpus must account for the loss of the primacy of vision, and descriptions of touch and sound bring attention to the inherent tension between reading the book on the one hand, and the multi-sensorial reading (of the warscape) from which the literary accounts stem. Written after the fact, these narratives are a revisiting in their own right and the narrators must navigate this return to a time and place of war. How does my analysis of the bodily materiality of the soldiers, the weapons, the frontline, and the warscape tie in with different kinds of reading? How does the soldiers' experience of their vision becoming less important create a tension between 'reading' as a visual act and 'reading' as an interpretative tool that, in war, must also rely on other senses?

In *Undertones* there is a to-and-fro between descriptions of nature and the landscape as it is without war, and the situation of war in that landscape. As many writers who fought in the war convey in their texts, being at the front line was always alternated with periods out of the lines, in back- and rest stations. It is precisely this change between two states of being at the frontline and in the back lines—active and waiting, exhilarating/terrifying and boring/restful—that draws these sensorial perceptions into focus. Arriving at the front, Blunden's eye is always on the landscape of northern France and his initial perceptions are thus primarily visual. That is, until he is in the thick of a bombardment, and the sensorial landscape shifts: sounds and vibrations replace the musings on visual elements. Before this happens, there are interactions in the narration that tell of the front before it is experienced, such as when someone near the canteen addresses the soldiers: 'The line was hell, he said, and flung his arms heavenwards as some explosions dully shook the silence' (Blunden 1982: 21). Interactions such as these engage the dichotomy between sound and silence, where silence relates to 'ordinary' life (of which the army also becomes part, but only up to a point) and sound relates to combat situations: battle and the frontline. This dichotomy and the way the two alternate in the text reminds the reader of the fact that explosions are *extra*ordinary; they constitute a man-made, *war*-made situation.

When Blunden and his comrades are under fire, this realization slowly comes to him as the sounds themselves initially only remind him of insects; 'several furious insect-like zips

went past my ear, and slowly enough I connected these noises with loud hollow popping of rifles ahead' (1982: 23). The noises are disembodied, the popping of the rifles is 'hollow' and are more akin to insects than recognizable as the impact of bullets. Such similes with natural phenomena and creatures are recurrent throughout Blunden's text. For example, shortly afterwards while in the trenches he points out: 'At some points in the trench, bones pierced through their shallow burial, and skulls appeared like mushrooms' (Blunden 1982: 25). The existing landscape becomes intertwined with the actions of war and bullets end up flying in more seemingly harmless ways than intended. Bullets 'made a peculiar anthem, some swinging past with a full cry, some cracking loudly like a child's burst bag, some in ricochet from the wire or the edge of ruins groaning as in agony or whizzing like gnats' (ibid). This descriptive mode, likening bullets first to cries and a child's burst bag makes them sound deceptively non-threatening, neutralised. It is a stark difference with the bark of the machine gun which brings forth these deadly bullets, which remains a threatening, monstrous presence (as detailed in Chapter IV). The bullets here have moved out of the human realm and are taken up by the landscape, become part of it. Human remains are compared to nothing more than markers in the landscape: 'I saw old uniforms, and a great many bones, like broken birdcages. One uniform identified a German officer; the skeleton seemed less coherent than most, and an unexploded shell lay on the edge of the fragment' (Blunden 1982: 27).

The role of sound as it pertains to the machine gun has already been explored in Chapter IV. Sound becomes primary and ever-present in the 'world of noise' that is life on the battlefield (Capt. Charles Carrington in Gregory 2015: 107). Smell and touch also played an important role as the landscape deteriorated. Leonard suggests they became as important as sight: 'the senses became essential in adapting to the spatial disorientation that trench life inflicted' (2012: 59). I argue this 'adaptation' is effectively a reading. In my corpus the ability to read the various elements of a warscape properly comes forward as vital for survival in the trenches.

Storm of Steel is littered with references to the sounds and impact of different shells hitting near their dugouts. Jünger details his beginnings at the front as an 'inexperienced recruit':

Still unfamiliar with the sounds of war, I was not able to distinguish the hisses and whistles and bangs of our own gunnery from the ripping crash of enemy shells, and hence, to get a sense of the lines of engagement. Above all, I could not account for the way I seemed to be under fire from all sides, so that the trajectories of the various shells were criss-crossing apparently aimlessly over the little warren of trenches where a few of us were holed up. (Jünger 2003: 25)

Not only was there no way to prepare him for the kind of knowledge he needed to have, to recognize the different shells by their sound, the noise of their approach to gage their landing, and if this meant he should take cover. Effectively he was not able to read the situation yet. Consequently, the sounds do not relate to their shape, and everything seems to be 'coming from all sides' (ibid). The evocative way this is described references sounds and impact, even confused lines of vision; there are 'whistles and bangs', a 'ripping crash', and lethal shells 'criss-cross' about 'aimlessly'. Later in *Storm of Steel,* Jünger seems to be doing better, and is now able to explain some of the differences:

Sometimes you hear a whistling, fluttering sound, following a dull discharge. 'Watch out, trench mortar!' You rush to the nearest dugout steps and hold your breath. The mortars explode differently, altogether more excitingly than common-or-garden shells. There's something violent and devious about them, something of personal vitriol. They are treacherous things. Rifle-grenades are a scaled-down version of them. (2003: 45)

The experience of the whistle and flutter seem benign compared to the earlier bangs, but immediately after these sounds are heard, someone yells a warning, and the explosion is felt to be not merely loud or dangerous: they are 'violent and devious' even carrying 'something of personal vitriol'. The ordnance that is discharged is effectively personified and a sentient thing coming at them. The gentle way in which these sounds are described are juxtaposed with its brutal effects. However, this is a piece of knowledge that is imparted on Jünger by a more experienced man. The warning voice has no known origin, it is not suggested that this is superior or inferior in rank, and the isolation of the warning voice creates a sense of comradeship. In moments of danger the men on the frontline take care of

each other, yelling warnings rather than just protecting themselves without heeding the others. Sociality is thus generated by auditory-based warnings concerning incoming shells (both the sounds of the shells and the warning of the soldier). The visual experience of being at the front is one of the things that is meticulously noted down by Jünger (West 92-3). The sounds, the constant analysis of the weapons on both sides, and Jünger's thoughts on the way in which trench warfare might be—should be—fought to avoid stalemates, they all show a narrator who has cultivated the ability to read the situations he finds himself in.

All Quiet shows similar interaction with the sounds of the front. In it, the first glimpse a group of new recruits have with the frontline becomes a game of question and answer— not between the soldiers, but between the different sounds:

> It is not fear. Men who have been up as often as we have become thick skinned. Only the young recruits are agitated. Kat explains to them: 'That was a twelve-inch. You can tell by the report; now you'll hear the burst.' But the muffled thud of the burst does not reach us. It is swallowed up in the general murmer [*sic*] of the front: [...]. (Remarque 1970: 50)

The front itself speaks, drowning out the auditory knowledge that the older soldiers have gathered over the course of their tour. This 'murmur' might be less subdued than the word leads to suspect. All perceptions are relayed in an even voice, but they concern bombardments and machine gun fire. This is mirrored in the stillness of the soldiers, people get slightly anxious when the sounds do not follow the pattern they have learned to recognize, but they are not startled by any of the smells, sounds, or vibrations.

In Barbusse's narrative the sound of the 'coffee-mill' (see Chapter IV) is thought to be heard before they realise it was something else (2016: 232-233), and in Jünger's text such a process is shown as well. It seems that, through experience (and the good luck of surviving these experiences), the protagonist has mastered this skill of knowing what's coming without looking, through hearing:

> In the dark I could hear the voice of one recruit who was still unversed in our ways: 'That lieutenant never seems to take cover.'

'He knows what's what,' he was told by a member of the storm troop. 'If there's one on its way, then he's the first to lie down.'

We only took cover now when it was necessary, but then we didn't hang around. The degree of necessity is something that only an experienced man can determine, who can sense the course of the shell before the new soldier can hear the light fluttering of its approach. (2003: 164)

His tone has changed, as has the setting of the scene. We see the soldiers during a calm moment, and Jünger has turned into the inadvertent teacher, rather than the pupil; this has been a learning process. There is no longer chaos, sensory descriptions, confusion, or loud voices. In the darkness there are only voices, but they are calm and instructive, establishing Jünger as an authority – he is 'that lieutenant' and the recruit's superior, both in rank and experience. By now he knows when to take cover, which sounds mean what, and to act accordingly. Right before the quoted scene he mentions the shells that scared the recruit: 'We passed through the forest of Houthulst and the village of Koekuit to the reserve battalion, and on the way were forced to break stride by a few heavy shells' (Jünger 2003: 164). The shells are not even mentioned as individual sounds or impact this time around, they are merely the thing that slowed them down. On a narrative level we are made aware he has mastered this soldier-skill though his inaction; he knows none of the sounds were worth cowering over—they were not even relayed individually to us readers. What is suggested here is that before this process of familiarization, there is discomfort and disconnect. Structures of sense-making through the senses, and of perceiving the landscape are broken down in order to be rebuilt in a new way. What thus emerges, is the transformation of landscape, through its destruction, into a warscape.

The introduction to this altered landscape—the frontline—that the reader of *All Quiet* is presented with, unfolds as follows:

The air becomes acrid with the smoke of the guns and the fog. The fumes of powder taste bitter on the tongue. The roar of the guns makes our lorry stagger, the reverberation rolls raging away to the rear, everything quakes. Our faces change imperceptibly. We are not, indeed, in the front-line, but only in the reserves yet in every face can be read: This is the front, now we are within its embrace.

It is not fear. (Remarque 1970: 50)

The text downplays the visual (without leaving it behind entirely) as it describes the other sensory experiences. In quick succession, we get the air, taste, roar, reverberation, and quakes that tell the men in the lorry—and the reader—this is the frontline. The sensations described focus on the tactile. The change in the air is seen, but also felt, inhaled, smelled, and tasted. The movement of the gun rolls through the landscape, their vehicle and their bodies. In turn, as is pointed out, the change that they 'feel' around them and in themselves can be read in their faces. The air changes with fog, but also with the smoke that comes from the guns (possibly, likely, machine guns) the choice to describe the air as 'acrid' is evocative in its meaning; it does not solely refer to a smell, but also to a taste, a somewhat angry, bitter, irritatingly strong and unpleasant taste or smell. It is felt to be both in this moment. He knows this smell/taste and the guns that are responsible, the fog trapping it low to the ground and creating the bitter-tasting fumes of (gun)powder described in the following sentence. From smell and taste, the focus of the narration shifts to the sensation of the 'roar of the guns', moving from the vibration-level that is sound to actual outward movement, making their 'lorry stagger'. This scene is a break with the literary description before, moving almost entirely to the haptic, describing sensory, physical experience. On the page it does not look any different—no special placements, start of a new chapter or other structural changes. On a textual level, however, everything is different. Sight is now almost completely abandoned as they move under the cover of darkness and are left for their other senses to give them information of their surroundings. Without visual distractions, all the perceptions are to do with the ongoing war, they are signs of the situation they are driving into. They leave the 'normal' landscape behind and through the restructuring of the senses, they enter the cauldron of the warscape.

This change is wordlessly acknowledged by the men present, as they feel the change come upon them from the inside out; 'imperceptibly' changing their faces. All this movement, this reconfiguration of the landscape around them, ends in an embrace. How have their faces changed? It is said it is not fear. Beyond that, are they more serious, excited? The embrace suggests something positive or loving, but primarily something (sentient) reaching out. The frontline is thus interpreted as having some kind of agency,

making a call on the soldiers that they must respond to. The front is the actor here, while the soldiers are acted upon. Remarque continues:

> We feel that in our blood a contact has shot home. That is no figure of speech; it is fact. It is the front, the consciousness of the front, that makes this contact. The moment that the first shells whistle over and the air is rent with the explosions there is suddenly in our veins, in our hands, in our eyes a tense waiting, a watching, a heightening alertness, a strange sharpening of the senses. The body with one bound is in full readiness.
>
> It often seems to me as though it were the vibrating, shuddering air that with a noiseless leap springs upon us; or as though the front itself emitted an electric current which awakened unknown nerve-centres. (Remarque 1970: 51)

It is not the first time the soldiers go to the frontline, and the consciousness that they have met there before reaches out to them, re-establishing contact through the violence of the exploding ordnance, the sounds of the shells rushing past; through sensory experience. The effect that these sensory perceptions have, is immediate and corporal. The narrator makes a point of stating that this is not merely a figure of speech: the soldiers feel it down to the blood in their bodies. In the contact that is established between their bodies and the front, the front has gained a form of consciousness through its existence as a warscape. The front does not communicate in words other than the cries of the men and the barks of the machine guns, but the front is not portrayed without agency. It is the which front forges this contact between it and the body of the soldier, which responds accordingly. The sensory truly hits home in the body and the men are transformed: 'The body with one bound is in full readiness'. It is described as something that is felt in their blood, in the 'tense waiting' of their hands, their eyes—a full-body experience. They are overtaken by what sounds like a predatory animal that 'springs upon' them, but this image is quickly replaced with something far more modern. The front is electric, currents awakening the until-recently sleeping parts of the soldiers' body. Newly 'awakened nerves-centres', allowing the soldier to feel and experience even more, are now at the front's disposal. Rather than being filled with dread, there is an excitement about this meeting for the soldiers. Compared to the bullets, the personification of the front is comparable to the presence of the machine gun—

that ubiquitous presence at the front line (see Chapter V). Through the soldiers' experience of the loss of the primacy of vision in the trenches, a tension is created between 'reading' as a visual act and 'reading' as an interpretative tool that can also (must also, in WWI) rely on the other senses. The frontline is an example of the way in which warscapes require that the protagonists learn to 'read' anew. This raises the question of how we, in turn, read landscapes, (former) warscapes and WWI literature.

Bodies in Cemeteries in Fields

We are once again seated in Judith's now-familiar kitchen, with the Aga on and the row of Vickers MGC bullets in the windowsill from the time Judith had organised a shooting. It was not something which could be arranged in the present-day, because it would be impossible to ensure the insurance for the attending MGC/OCA members. Similarly, the battlefield tours which they sometimes went on (guided by Paul Reed) are complicated by the Brexit vote. Judith shows me family photos: of her father's family shortly before Wilfred went to war, of Wilfred in uniform, of different MGC companies, of the visit to Wilfred's grave with her father and two cousins (fig. 3), and those of other graves in the Grave and Memorial Photographic Project (see Chapter I).

Fig. 15. Judith and her father on the left. Wilfred's headstone is close to that of the men next to him, as they died in hospital on the same day

On the battlefield tour detailed in the opening of this chapter, both Paul and the other tour guide told me that they do these tours in the hope that people will become aware of the scale of the war, as well as the human aspect. When they said this, the image of Judith and her father standing behind the gravestone of their father and grandfather (fig. 15), and the connected memory of waving the soldier buried there goodbye, came to mind. Adrian Barlow (2013) observes: 'On a practical level, a war cemetery is designed and organised in such a way as to enable relatives and other visitors readily to locate the exact burial place of the person they have come to find' (311). My first walks through the cemeteries on the visit with my mother were not focused on personal or national connections, and so I read the gravestones a certain way: from how far have they come? How old were they? What company were they from? What do the carved bomb emblems mean? (Royal Grenadiers: see fig. 16). What did their family members have engraved on the headstone? After I had started fieldwork and went on a battlefield tour in that context, this shifted and the question became: where are the MGC graves? (See fig. 17).

Fig. 16. A Royal Fusilier insignia and fig. 17. Machine Gun Corps insignia. Meaulte Military Cemetery, the Somme

Many of the MGC graves have no names, and when I enquired about this, I was told the artillery would target the machine guns directly, meaning that often the men did not just die together, their remains could no longer be told apart or identified. This is a particularly poignant but often overshadowed element of the UK government's decision to not

repatriate the bodies of the soldiers—it was often impossible because the soldiers did not just die in the trenches but were often merged with the landscape, as their closely placed together commonwealth gravestones signal (fig. 18). A real-life illustration of what happens in the aftermath when '[a] machine-gun barks, but is silenced with a bomb' (Remarque 1970: 102-3). 'Missing' in WWI often meant a body could not be found on account of this happening. As Saunders points out, these are the men who are now commemorated 'on monuments to 'The Missing', and symbolized by the 'Unknown Soldier'' (Saunders 2003: 15).

Fig. 18. Graves of private W. Winter and J.W. Jones at the Corbie Communal Cemetery (Extension) on the Somme. Courtesy of MGC/OCA member Alan Scrutton

The link to kin was not present for me, but it was as if I was able to inhabit some of the MGC/OCA's ties (which are not exclusively kinship ties). There were no MGC members on the battlefield tour, but I did find myself photographing MGC graves.[53] Perhaps this, too, is a matter of scale. There are too many graves to feasibly pass by one by one, and the

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[53] This is a practice which has continued: whenever I see something MGC related I send Judith pictures.

MGC/OCA—and Judith's stories on a personal level—provide a means or anchor for dealing with the mass of dead. The gravestones with religious markers, the annual MGC/OCA service in Grantham—these elements become important in their repetition, and through their link with the people they commemorate. These familial links had in fact not dropped away but changed due to the rupture of WWI, and commemoration for the whole corps is fostered by the OCA. My experiences in the field allowed me to 'read' the former battlefields differently. The personal nature of the stories of Judith's kin and those of the veterans Paul had encountered, established a link or bridge between my literary corpus and the former battlefields. Another way in which this gap shows, is when we consider how memory is dealt with in the landscape of the formerly neutral Netherlands, and that of the former Western Front and the UK.

On a map that collects and shows WWI commonwealth cemeteries around the world, Belgium and France's maps show something of the carnage in congealed form. Rather than the (barely moving) crisscrossing lines of the Western Front, with the seemingly 'empty' No-Man's Land in-between, this lists the commonwealth war graves. The CWGC has as one of their explicit purposes to remember each veteran individually, regardless of situation in life, and this commitment can be seen on the maps as well as at the sites themselves. The Netherlands only has a handful of such graves in cemeteries in the country (see fig. 19), especially when compared to their neighbouring countries (Belgium, France, Great Britain). Some of the cemeteries hold only one WWI Commonwealth War Grave, while others list several hundred, but those always count the WWI and WWII together. The CWGC does not catalogue German casualties (most are in mass graves, not individual ones) and there are only handful of Commonwealth War Graves in Germany—which is unsurprising since the German line the allied forces were trying to push back against was located outside of Germany. The maps of Belgium and the North of France show something very different from the few pinpricks on the Dutch map (see fig. 20 and fig. 21).

Fig. 19. The Netherlands

Fig. 20. Belgium
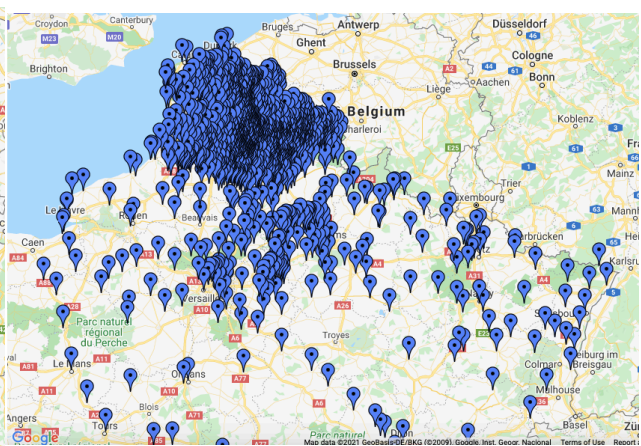
Fig. 21. Northern France

Four years of fighting are overlayed, showing concentrations of military war dead. It is, in many ways, a map of both conflict and aftermath—with a decided focus on the aftermath through the memorialisation of the death of these soldiers. Commonwealth war graves in Belgium start sparsely, in the North of the country where it borders the Netherlands, swelling wave-like towards the south of the country, to then become a dense blue field that covers almost all the place names across the border in the north of France. This mirrors the way the dead and the names of the dead exist in the public space of these countries—in a way they do not in the Netherlands. The map of the UK 'cannot be viewed on Google Maps as it is too large'—there are too many cemeteries to compute when I zoom out

(*Commonwealth Cemeteries* n.p.). This is also a testament to how many men died after the war, and the memorial mirrors locals set up in the UK in lieu of having a grave to tend.

How, then, is the fallen soldier who is so central to the narrative of WWI reconstructed (for commemoration) in his absence? Brittain has given us a chronologically ordered memoir which attempts to reconstruct the story though the gathering of different texts, ranging from her own old diaries, others' poetry, letters, quotes she uses as epigraphs, and so on. These memories and bits of text Brittain has assembled in *Testament* are meticulously tended to, and it is easy to read this care as an echo or repetition of the caring role that she describes taking on as a VAD nurse. Similarly, it is reminiscent of the mentioning, counting, and mourning of fallen comrades that male war writers engaged in ('trench literature'). Throughout *Testament*, Brittain utilises and references other texts. She makes clear that there have been other attempts at writing about the war years, and that she bases herself primarily on these sources and her diaries of the time. Out of my corpus, *Testament of Youth* is the text which is the least plagued with questions on veracity. Its project as an autobiography is further emphasised in the text through the sections of her own wartime diary and other copied text (such as letters) which are included. Confronting loss and remembering those she has lost are central to Brittain's narrative, as she takes on the role of mourner of the dead. To write of the lives of those she has lost, to show their writing in letters and poetry, to honour and remember the particularities of their person. Richard Badenhausen (2003) argues that Brittain's writing engages with the effects of trauma on her own person, as well as an extended process of mourning the men in her life that died as serving soldiers (422-3). To Badenhausen this is the central narrative challenge at play in *Testament*, and as a result the narrative has a shape decidedly similar to representations of war by men who experienced combat and lost comrades (ibid). Brittain has given us a chronologically ordered memoir which attempts to reconstruct the story through the gathering of different texts, ranging from her own old diaries, her fiancé Roland's poetry, letters, quotes she uses as epigraphs, and so on (Badenhausen 2003: 437). And as Badenhausen points out, the memoir does in some way function 'as a memorial to her lost male companions and their silenced voices' (2003: 431). Brittain details a loss that was well known to British civilians, who would doubly have to deal with the absence of their loved ones as they had died and their remains and grave stayed abroad. The re-inscription of the dead in their texts is a key element of the WWI genre. In *Storm of Steel* too, for

example, attention is drawn to those who have died. They are named, followed by the place or battle of their death in brackets. These place- and battle names sometimes synonymous and we know their remains are still where they fell. The effect is almost casual yet careful in its way of committing this information to the page:

> It was here that I made close friendships, which were to stand the test of many battlefields, with several outstanding fellows, among them Clement, who fell at Monchy, with the painter Tebbe (at Cambrai), and with the Steinforth brothers (at the Somme). (Jünger 2003: 59)

In the original German these brackets are not present, ('so mit Clement, der bei Monchy, mit dem Maler Tebbe, der bei Cambrai, mit den Brüdern Steinforth, die an der Somme fallen sollten' (Jünger 1978: 21)), but the subordinate clause with which their death and its place is mentioned reads distant here, too. Writing the dead in this way creates an ominous foreboding which is only increased when we recognise the place names, such as 'the Somme' because they still bear weight to the modern reader, and while being spared the details of their deaths, we come a little closer to knowing how these comrades must have died—sometimes even on what day. Jünger's perceptions still hold '[t]he telescopic nature of this gaze [which] is located […] outside of the realm of feeling, emotion, pain. Its medium is photography, photography as weapon, seeing as an act of attack' (Huyssen 1993: 16). These friendships might have stood the test of battlefields, their lives have not. The family who visits after the hostilities ended are another circle to this ripple, as is the way they memorialise the dead. The scale of the war and death that has occurred is significant here.

Commemorative practices such as the battlefield tours and the Commonwealth gravestones say something about our relationship to the dead, but also present social structures between the living. Before the graves were even there, the names of the Flemish towns where the soldiers were fighting rang familiar to the civilians who followed the news closely. Now that the trenches are gone and the towns rebuilt, the commemorative places have taken up a presence in the region. There are clear differences between the past warscape as it is represented in WWI literature, its present remnants, and its commemoration in markers and rituals, but these all consider the memory of the war in distinct ways. With the monumentalisation of the graves (which were initially wooden

crosses) and other battlefield markers there now seems to be an added layer that is placed onto the image of WWI. It is in some ways 'sanitised', myths have become truth, and we have familiarized ourselves with the uniform white Commonwealth gravestones. These commemorative elements mark the landscape in a distinctive way, with greater or lesser meaning depending on one's national story about WWI. According to Annemarie Bucher (2016), what is important to consider when dealing with warscapes is that '[l]andscape may be made up of both physical and geographical features but they are also constituted through perceived experiences' (32). This is especially true for warscapes-turned-commemorative sites. Bucher continues: 'We construct landscape through imagination as much as through vision' (ibid). The WWI-era literary texts by authors such as Remarque, Blunden, Brittain, Barbusse, and Jünger, give information about the landscape that can no longer be found in the landscape itself—but a form of haunting might still be present in other forms. The way people such as the MGC/OCA members engage with the remnants of this war is an indication of the way in which it has not fully been relegated to the past. In their remembrance and commemoration practices, the MGC/OCA considers the lore that exists in their family, archival research, and the objects and writing that was left behind by servicemen. At one remembrance event in 2019, for example, the entry of exactly a hundred years ago on that day was read from the diary of a MGC soldier.

One of the main pillars of cultural memory studies engages with these commemoration practices and the ways in which instances of mass death are remembered by groups and societies (see Connerton 1989; Nora 1989; Huyssen 1993). As such, cultural memory studies provide tools for analysis of the societal context with which both the regimental association members and the peace activists can be viewed. Paola Filippucci (2019) engages with the anthropology and archaeology of landscape, specifically at the former Western Front, and she argues that landscapes that are 'shaped by mass destruction and mass death' are not passive backdrops or repositories 'for historical, social, and individual memory', but instead 'can be considered a memorial agent' (82). While vastly different, the members of the two fieldwork groups are, in their engagement with and attachment to remnants, texts, and other elements and ideas of WWI, two sides of the same coin. VCNV remembers the past to fuel present and future activism (and action), while the MGC/OCA is intent on honouring the people of the past. As Matt Hodges (2013) notes: 'it is vital to note that invoking the past *always* implicates the future' (478, original emphasis).

Beyond the soldiers that did and did not make it home (but were often not released by the war), there is also a rich history of haunting and ghosts of soldiers that are similarly not letting their comrades—or the place they fell—go. I will come back to both the implicated future and haunting in the conclusion. First, however, we must pass through No Man's Land.

Walking in No Man's Land

Lying in the middle of opposing trenches from where ammunition would be shot across, No Man's Land separated the belligerent troops.[54] In this liminal space separating the opposing front lines, different rules applied than in the trenches or in the villages. As the *Smithsonian Magazine* points out: 'It was in No Man's Land that the spontaneous Christmas truce of December 1914 took place and where opposing troops might unofficially agree to safely remove their wounded comrades, or even sunbathe on the first days of spring' (Deutsch 2014: n.p.). The function of the strip of land shifted, and although it is where moments of play and relaxation took place, it was not a safe space in which to find oneself by any means. In *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (1979) Eric J. Leed points out that the soldiers 'cite the comradeship that erased "artificial" social barriers, the sharing of a common destiny, and the equality of condition that transcended rank and even enmity – for it extended across No Man's Land in particular sectors of the front' (24). Leed describes a feeling of compassion for the soldiers' comrades that includes one's own trenches and No Man's Land, but because the opposing army makes the same encapsulating view, Leed suggests it almost forces soldiers to consider the enemy troops as humans like themselves because of the overlap that exists in No Man's Land, where any man might fall (ibid). For example, when in *All Quiet* the protagonist is stuck in a shell-hole in No Man's Land with a dying Frenchman, it is only there, after he kills the Frenchman, that he sees his enemy's humanity. In effect, it is land that belongs to no man, that is not claimed by either party because both armies need this strip of separation. It is the space where they would cross each other in combat or in its aftermath.

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[54] In French the English term tends to be used, in German and Dutch it is '*Niemandsland*'.

In Blunden's *Undertones,* No Man's Land is a definite presence, as it concerns his account of his time in WWI—and he was often part of 'wiring operations'. This would concern laying and repairing frequently broken telephone wires across No Man's Land and barbed wire repairs. In *Testament,* Brittain shows that her fiancé Roland is felled while on such a job, fixing wires only shortly before a leave he never got to take. In *All Quiet* there are only a couple of instances in which No Man's Land is mentioned, and the first comes very early on:

> Strange to say, Behm was one of the first to fall. He got hit in the eye during an attack, and we left him lying for dead. We couldn't bring him with us, because we had to come back helter-skelter. In the afternoon suddenly we heard him call, and saw him crawling about in No Man's Land. He had only been knocked unconscious. Because he could not see, and was mad with pain, he failed to keep under cover, and so was shot down before anyone could go and fetch him in. (Remarque 1970: 16)

There is an element of helplessness present in the scene above, as the death of their first comrade is played out as if on a stage. The other soldiers can watch but not help. His presence in the exposed strip of land is more dangerous than that in the trenches, as anyone who might want to help him would also be at risk. Wounded and without the help of his comrades, Behm quickly meets his end. In fact, Leed points out that

> Astonishing numbers of those who wrote about their experience of war designate No Man's Land as their most lasting and disturbing image. This was a term that captured the essence of an experienced of having been sent beyond the outer boundaries of social life, placed between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the uncanny. (1979: 15)

The shifting social codes and what might or might not happen in No Man's Land was cause for fear. In the narrative the given information is sparse. In the scene where Behm dies there is no detail of what this sounded like, but there is another instance in *All Quiet* which might give us an idea. After a bombardment, the sounds of a group of wounded and dying horses are heard screaming across No Man's Land, and the men cannot go to shoot them

without a ceasefire. Eventually they end up fleeing the scene to get away from the terrible sound: 'We can bear almost anything. But now the sweat breaks out on us. We must get up and run no matter where, but where these cries can no longer be heard. And it is not men, only horses' (Remarque 1970: 59). The last sentence hints at quite how awful the human cries of comrades and enemies must be. The neutral zone of No Man's Land thus veers between extremes: a space where sunbathing and football with the enemy could take place, but also a space of unspoken—yet vocal, as discussed in relation to the machine gun—horror.

There is also a spectral element to No Man's Land. In Brittain's *Testament* there is explicit mention of ghost-like apparitions on the battlefield, usually relating to the men she is nursing. She hears and is told several stories of (long-)dead soldiers helping their comrades, who survive because of them (2014: 378-80). Stretcher-bearers who died 'in the old days on the Somme,' but who were seen again 'last week', with one soldier insisting that he was carried out by two of those dead men (2014: 379). Someone swears a soldier who died a week earlier helped his comrades—he recognised him by his identity disk, which he had memorised at the time of the burial (ibid).[55] Brittain makes mention of her older notes, then reproduces the conversation, before adding a section of a poem this reminded her of, and then her own perceptions and opinions come in, influenced by the image of the ward and the sisters hurrying around: 'I recognised my world for a kingdom of death, in which the poor ghosts of the victims had no power to help their comrades by breaking nature's laws' (2014: 380). Brittain continues her thoughts on the subject, reflecting on the 'Angel of Mons' (ibid).[56] What is particularly interesting about the accounts Brittain relays in her memoir, is that some of the ghosts are 'voiced'—they have and use their (own) voice, even in this third-hand narration (second hand via the soldiers and three times removed from the dead soldiers). In this way, they are given life and presence. For the men caring for the dead might become a task later in life but in the still war-torn moment Brittain shows us, the dead men are still very much part of their lives – and not simply in a metaphorical sense.

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[55] Much like contemporary military tags, the round disks had a number identifying the soldiers.
[56] The Angels of Mons references the battle of Mons on 22 – 23 August 1914, when the British forces were surrounded and outnumbered five to one—which 4,000 soldiers managed to survive as fought their way through. Soon after, the story spread that they had been saved by angels.

Supernatural saviours are generalised in Brittain's account. The 'angelic saviours' she turns them into are rather generic in comparison to the individualism of the dead soldiers that are seen and experienced to be helping their comrades. Not only do they recognise someone, but they recognise their faces, voices, and mannerisms, they speak to them and are spoken to. It is the knowledge of their death earlier on in the war—giving it a certain authority, a knowledge that this person is dead and has been dead for a while—which makes the knowledge uncanny and unsettling. The soldiers seem almost haunted in the moment of retelling, but in the moment of battle they seem to be, very concretely, helped by these old comrades. Although the accounts of the men place the 'ghosts' close to them, it is in 'the nocturnal neutrality of No Man's Land' (2014: 380), that Brittain imagines the more detached spectres opposing each other, as the soldiers do from behind their respective lines on (in) the ground. The 'reading' of the zone changes, and with it, meaning (or its absence) is produced. In this, the night is another key element. For the soldiers many of their assaults (and their being assaulted) would take place under the cover of darkness. The darkness of night renders the space differently than in the daytime, opening to a legion of possibilities in the space that belongs to no man on the battlefields. The daylight hours show No Man's Land a desolate space—if weather conditions such as mist and rain don't obscure the view, and if one dared expose their head over the parapet—but at night the liminality of the space becomes more prominent. The possibilities of what might happen here seem to increase at night precisely because No Man's Land is not defined the way the trenches are. Spaces such as No Man's Land and the battlefield invite these spectral sightings and 'reliving' of the mass killing of the war—both during and after.

My mother and I must have driven right across No Man's Land on that first trip to the Somme, as it was pointed out to me on the battlefield tour. In the present state of the WWI battlefields, the liminality No Man's Land appeared in two places on the guided tour through the spectral warscape. There are certain swatches of land in the area, where it is still unsafe to walk, due to unexploded WWI ordnance, and they lie overgrown and untouched alongside freshly cut fields. Even more liminal were the cemeteries, where so many lie buried where they fell. Interestingly, these cemeteries are technically not Belgian; the CWWC cares for them and the ground that holds the British war dead has been gifted to

the UK 'in perpetuity'.[57] The cemeteries brought into focus the landscape of war as simultaneously a site of violent action and a final resting place, haunting the landscape with the presence of the dead while those at home were haunted by absence. How can such a haunting be 'read'? The conclusion will explore the way this and other WWI hauntings work through into our present and future.

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[57] The guide pointed out that some countries, like Turkey, did not really have choice in the matter, but in Belgium the state bought the land from local people before it was gifted.

Conclusion(s): Beginnings, Hauntings

Please Haunt Me Vera

The first time I read *Testament* in its entirety was at my field site in Chicago. While reading how Brittain lost the three people closest to her in WWI, it is the loneliness she describes that is most unsettling to me. On top of feeling the loss of these men she is left, she says, without anyone that truly knows her, in an altered world (Brittain 2014: 407). Personally, I consider *Testament* to be the most depressing (war) book I have ever read, and while reading I had the strong desire to put it down and remove myself from such sadness. At this point in my research I recognised, like some readers from the WWI war nations probably do, place names and dates; reading that her brother would be in a big offensive on July 1st (1916) was chilling—no explicit mention of the Somme was needed. Had I had kin who fought in the war, that feeling would undoubtedly have had an added layer, and perhaps a struggle not to see the other side as the enemy—and ultimately as responsible. I finished reading *Testament* as it could become an integral part of my research, but the mood that was set by the book was hard to escape. Events at my field site (such as my stay in DC) before I left had left me rattled, the first COVID-19 lockdowns had hit, and this book was not helping. When it comes to reading practices, Michael Warner (2004) distinguishes between critical and uncritical reading. He questions the supposed self-evidence of critical reading and posits uncritical reading as positive rather than naïve (Warner 13-5). There are several reading attitudes that fall under uncritical in his analysis: 'identification, self-forgetfulness, reverie, sentimentality, enthusiasm, literalism, aversion, distraction' (Warner 2004: 15). When investigating my own responses, identification and aversion are some of the key attitudes while I read *Testament*. My reading was uncritical in the sense that it was immersive and albeit affected by my own circumstances, the emotions described in the narrative did indeed feel like my own (see Reed forthcoming; Warner 2004). For me it was true that 'the stark representation of wartime grief and loss is arguably what makes the memoir so unforgettable' (Acton 2021: 241).

      This project is based on the juxtaposition of the multi-sited fieldwork and a selected corpus of WWI literature, allowing the thesis to develop asymmetrically. As briefly referenced in Chapter III, however, there was one moment where the corpus and the

ethnography converged: Kathy Kelly turned out to have read (and loved) Brittain's *Testament*. It is through Kathy's reading that I gained a new perspective on the text, one that was different from both my initial uncritical and later critical reading. I want to conclude by exploring this point of convergence.
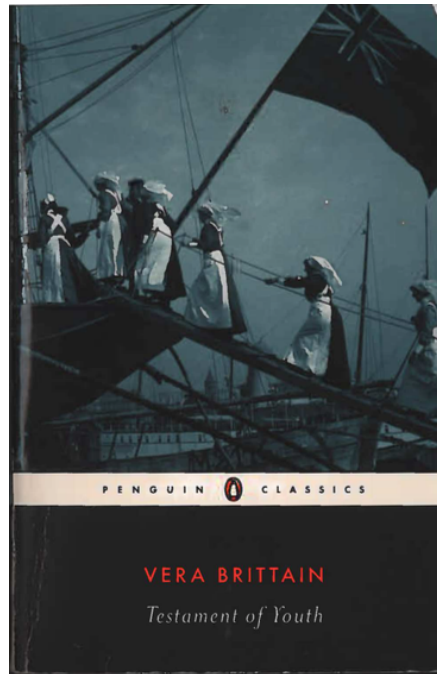
Fig. 22. Kathy's copy of *Testament of Youth*

Based on the love she expressed for *Testament,* Kathy and I agreed to read the book at the same time—it would be a rereading for Kathy and a first for me. Kathy's copy was later forwarded to me by Sarah, who lives at the VCNV house in Chicago. It is a Penguin Classics edition and comes with several printed and folded A4 pages form Kathy, which are pushed into the book (see fig. 22). When we called during the lockdowns to discuss *Testament*, Kathy told me the following:

> Just the fact that I hold this book years later, many years later, because Vera picked up her pen and, you know, had the presence of mind to jot down notes, even you know on cold winter nights when she barely even had a blanket, no doubt, and you know her hands had been covered by blood and she probably still has the blood underneath her fingernails, and… you know.

So, her ability to keep communicating amidst loss and anguish, bereavement, despair, bitterness probably toward the generation that got them into this, it is a huge assertion to me. Words can be stronger than weapons. They aren't right now it would seem, but the potential is still there, I think. The fact that she touched me so deeply and opens up a whole world of exploration into what makes me tick in terms of despair?

And it's good, too. To enter into that and not cover it or turn it off. By reading this I almost feel like being 'switched on' in some sense. I think the more that you feel related to her, the less likely one is to switch off. That's why it's important. Yeah, that Vera may haunt me. Please haunt me, Vera.

What does it mean to be haunted by a (historical, literary) textual voice; what does Kathy mean when she says: *Please haunt me, Vera*? Kathy's response to reading *Testament* suggests that she relates to Vera on a personal level, reading things that she admires and is inspired by. To Kathy, there is an undeniable connection between Brittain's eighty-year-old WWI text and the efforts she and like-minded peace activists are involved in. Vera Brittain can be said to function as a moral exemplar (see Chapter III) to Kathy. As Adam Reed (2011) maps the effects of immersive reading, he notes that one can speak of

enrapturing literature 'haunting' the reader, leaving a lasting impression whose resonance he or she carries as an 'echo' into the future. Either way, it seems accepted that the impact of reading a novel does not necessarily end when the last page is finished and the book finally closed and put down. (7)

Not only did *Testament* leave a lasting impression on Kathy, its impact was indeed not only felt during the process of reading but also afterwards in contemplation and reflection well after she finished reading the book—and welcomed it again when I proposed she might (re)read it with me. Kathy describes seeing or imagining Brittain in the act of writing, a view which has been imparted by the narrative itself. Kathy's understanding of Brittain and her repeated assertion 'you know', come from the experience of co-reading the text as she and I have. Notwithstanding Blunden's assertion that those who have not experienced cannot

understand (see Introduction), Kathy's response after immersive reading would suggest that it *can* be experienced as known (see Reed forthcoming; 2011; 2019).

Being 'switched on' is effectively a reading response in Kathy's account. Kathy describes an immersive reading experience which does not question the text. I would suggest this is not an uncritical act. Rather, what is being scrutinised is oneself and one's life, choices, actions. Kathy describes a reflective reading practice embedded in, and organised by, the ethical project of cultivating 'one kind of person or another, as Warner puts it (2004: 19; Reed forthcoming: n.p.). The kind of person which is cultivated (by oneself, through reading) is one who is 'switched on' to concerns and challenges around them, and who is able and willing to take action based on the desire to ultimately 'do good' (two points I will return to later in this section).

When I receive Kathy's copy of *Testament* and leaf through it I see there is one section which has clearly elicited the strongest response from Kathy (see fig. 23 and 24). It comprises the end of Chapter II: Provincial Young-Ladyhood, Chapter III: Oxford Versus War, and Chapter IV: Learning Versus Life. Brittain became a VAD nurse and nursed wounded soldiers in London, Malta and behind (but close to) the frontlines in France. Beyond that, in the years after the war she travelled to Germany, seeing the devastation war brought there too, and she supported the League of Nations from its inception (after having picked her studies back up and adding International Relations to it). The League of Nations was established on January 10, 1920, at the initiative of the victorious Allied powers at the end of WWI with the explicit goal of promoting world peace/the end of war through international cooperation. In its immediate post-war rejection of warfare, '[t]he central, basic idea of the movement was that aggressive war is a crime not only against the immediate victim but against the whole human community' (*Britannica* n.p.).

Brittain undertook this explicit peace-making effort with a close friend who also suffered losses in the war, and it is the continuation of an attitude Kathy recognises in the earlier chapters of the book. Seemingly small things in the scope of the book (such as studying at Oxford in 1914, when women's colleges had only existed for thirty-five years) indicate to her that Brittain is someone capable of committing to difficult issues long before the war started. Kathy has pointed out that on re-reading the text, she saw all these indications that Vera might end up becoming 'a stayer'; someone who does not walk or turn away during hard times when upsetting things are happening. Kathy is aware Brittain did

'stay with it'. It is this element specifically which seems valuable to Kathy in a moral sense, as something to take as an example. Zagzebski describes moral exemplars as those we see as 'most imitable, and they are most imitable because they are most admirable. We identify admirable persons by the emotion of admiration, and that emotion is subject to education through the example of the emotional reactions of other persons' (2013: 200). Moral exemplars and their actions are seen as admirable in a way that invites reflection and imitation. Through the autobiographical account we get a sense of a life that is concerned with the everyday as much as with the exceptional, and in Kathy's reading the narrative takes on this function of inspiring reflection.
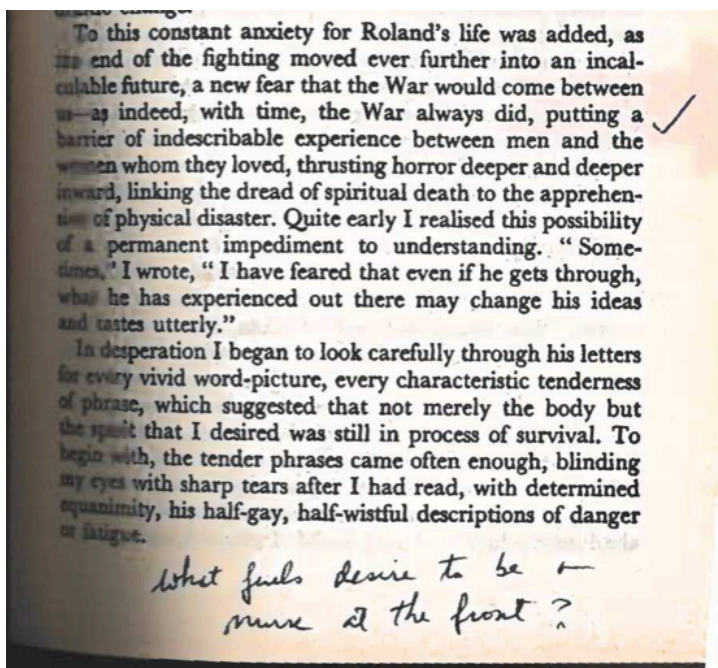
Fig. 23. Annotated page: 'What fuels desire to be a nurse at the front?'

Kathy's annotations in *Testament* muse on Brittain's life trajectory and suggest links with the present and contemporary issues (which of course are not exclusive to the present moment). On page 143, for example, we read: 'What fuels desire to be a nurse at the front?' (see fig. 23). Kathy uses the questions posed through the text to reflect on bigger questions such as the nature of war (see fig. 24), but also to prompt questions about, and readings of, the present. And not just any present, but Kathy's present as it relates to her activist life.

Fig. 24. Annotated page: 'War: killing, maiming, displacing'

Many of the questions that come up in *Testament* are similar to questions that concern contemporary peace activism. *Testament* engages with the ongoing war, as Brittain was witness to extreme human suffering at the hands of this war as a nurse. Moreover, after the war ended, she committed herself to finding ways to prevent the next wars (which, as the narrative shows, is why Brittain was so invested in the League of Nati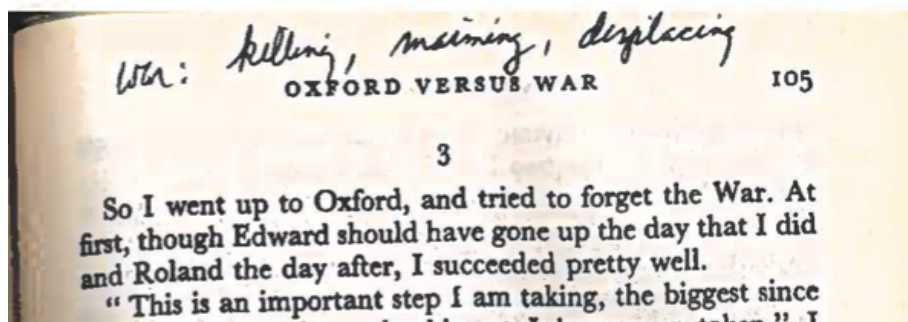ons). Kathy reflects on Vera's choices as described in *Testament*, and in turn reflects on her own position and choices in life. Kathy's reading is uncritical in the sense that it accepts the (veracity of the) narrative—allowing it to touch and affect her. This is done through disallowing despair to stay or become despairing, and instead morphing into a motivation which affirms nonviolence. Here too, as with the combat narratives, it is relevant that it is a true account, and that the lived life that is narrated can be held up as a mirror. As addressed in Chapter V, literary war texts such as *Testament* are viewed as equally poignant throughout the years because they provide a 'touch of the real', thereby giving access to the space or 'contact zone' where the object was first conjured into existence (Das 2005: 12; see Saunders 2003). As mentioned in Chapter I, Ahmed argues for the role of emotions in the establishing of individual and collective bodies (2004: 25). This 'feeling' technically falls under uncritical reading, but this both belies the potential of uncritical reading and (in my opinion wrongly) suggests critical reading is detached, not influenced by affect.

Kathy is able to view her emotions evoked by reading as responses which could be morphed into action, and this is particularly visible in her reading of *Testament*, even if the emotions are negative. As Reed points out, 'the figure that is held to be acted upon (or through) in the interactions around a specific art object, plays a central role as the figure that is understood to be exercising that creative agency' (2019: 5). The art object in this case is *Testament of Youth*. This is not restricted by an anthropocentric focus, allowing for 'the

entanglement of human and nonhuman actants' (ibid). The influence of this narrative, the materiality of the book, the voice that speaks to Kathy from it, they make actors of both the book and Kathy. As Ahmed argues, 'emotions *do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments' (2004: 26, original emphasis). It is an emotion Kathy asks for specifically, or rather the potential of the emotion to move her into further activist action. Affective reading then interpellates the reader, effectively addressing them, as though they are being spoken to–as if they are being haunted.

After Kathy told me she wanted to be—was—haunted by Vera Brittain, I started to see the ways in which haunting showed itself in other places in the research project. This is best addressed through the concept of hauntology. Jacques Derrida developed the concept of hauntology in *Spectres of Marx* (1993). Derrida asks:

> *What* is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter [*sic*], that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. (10, original emphasis)

Derrida's notion of the ghost or spectre as that which haunts us by not staying simply 'past'— 'Here again what seems to be out front, the future, comes back in advance: from the past, from the back' (ibid). Byron Good (2020) interprets this as follows: 'For Derrida, spirits, ghosts, and phantoms, which make themselves felt in language as that which stands amidst or is excluded by formal dichotomies, require a hauntology, not a resort to ontology' (418). It is precisely the liminal and the in-between that is present, and rather than forcing it to be one or the other, dead or alive, it leaves space for this spectre that is neither—or rather: both. The ghost that haunts requires its own theoretical framework. Referencing Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997) Good further points out that

The whole essence . . . [*sic*] of a ghost is that it has real presence and demands its due. . . [*sic*] Haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way . . . [*sic*] we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present. (2020: 417)

It is the presence of the past in the present, when it 'technically' could no longer be, but makes itself known, nonetheless. As Jacob Glazier (2017) contends: 'By invoking the trope of the ghost, hauntology helps to demonstrate how there still lingers in the absence of a thing, a spectral element that is more real than its corporeal counterpart' (1). The absence of a body does not equate to complete absence, the imprint of life they leave behind, felt, and interpreted by those who are still living, becomes a presence beyond life. Hauntology as such forms one useful backdrop to the ghostly encounters described in the chapters of this thesis, ranging from soldiers who return from the dead to help their comrades, to reading WWI texts, visiting the former battlefields, the practice of commemoration, and remembrance practices, as well as the affects that Kathy describes above. Hauntology in relation to WWI often suggests that there are more spectral remains that are tied to the landscape and the people that have spent up to four years of their lives entrenched in said landscape. The argument could be made that many of the descendants of WWI service men, such as Judith Lappin, are subject to this logic of hauntology, as they experience a type of present-day haunting. Rather than feeling the desire to follow their ancestors into history, they are moved by the upheaval and trauma in their ancestor's life—and linger there. Loevlie (2013) asserts: 'To live is to be haunted. Our "here and now", our material presence, is never stripped, bare or alone' (337).

The influence Kathy wishes Vera and her writing to have, is that of haunting—a guarantee she will not 'switch off'. Brittain functions as an exemplar for Kathy in this case. She has faced and done things that inspire Kathy to think about her life's choices. Towards the end of our conversation, I asked Kathy to return to this idea of haunting. I asked her: To what end is Vera to haunt you? Kathy:

Ah well. I'm nearing what could be, you know, the last years of my life. I'm maybe going to have another decade. I don't know, but if Vera haunts me then I will remember that in incredibly difficult circumstances she gave words to subsequent

generations. And that told stories that otherwise would be unheard about war. And I have some of those stories that have been entrusted to me from people in war zones, and they're not my stories. They don't belong to me, and I need to bequeath them in a sense. By picking up my pen or in some way recording and somehow… there's a benign goodness that comes through Vera's haunting.

Rather than a sense of right and wrong, it is this personal ethics of a 'benign *goodness*' which has the focus for Kathy. This is in alignment with what I experienced in the field, where it was noticeable that they protest structures while regarding those working in (and for) these structures as people who are not good or bad, but who have the potent to do better (i.e., not work for an arms fair, for example). As Maeckelbergh suggests, becoming part of a social movement is tied to 'a particular normative notion about how society should be organized' and they contradict 'the system of rule that prevails in the context in which the social movement operates' (2016: 214). Kathy looks at elements of Brittain's life as a reminder and mirror of what she wants to keep holding on to in her own life. Brittain haunting elicits responses, responses which can be valuable and should therefore not be suppressed—they are the things that can move people into action. In a transmorphed echo of Blunden's concerns, it is not a question of who the stories are meant for (see Chapter V) but of who hears them, who will pick it up and act.

This is also the crux in *Testament*. While telling her own individual story, Brittain also tells the story of others. Those she has lost become memorialised (see Chapter V). The bonds between her and those she has lost are not broken, despite the searing loneliness she describes, because with their disappearance their stories have been entrusted to her. There is still a sociality, morphed and mangled through war, but what she writes retains a relationship between her and others—a type of haunting which has led her to the writing of these men's lives as she has known them. In turn, *Testament* proved fertile ground for the haunting of others such as Kathy, who experiences a transferral of this responsibility.

From what I have witnessed in the field the 'goodness' Kathy mentions hardly ever takes the shape of words. Rather, smaller steps and statements (such as Sarah saying she met people 'that were just doing really cool things', see Chapter III) demonstrate the desire to mitigate harm and help others. I argue this can be called an act of critical reading, though different from the institutional critical reading Warner describes and challenges. As an

'ethical project', Kathy's critical reading is more akin to certain pious religious practices Warner describes (even if Kathy and VCNV are vocally secular), which have 'at its end a particular conception of the human being' (2004: 18). Rather, it is critical in the sense that it invites critical reflection on one's own life, instead of critical reading in the disciplinary sense, where the critical reader aims to remain uninvolved. But contrary to being incommensurable with critical citizenship, as Warner suggests (ibid); critical citizenship is its very foundation.

Corpus, Memory, Canon

Throughout this thesis I have referred to my corpus in one sense, that of a collection or compilation of texts. In conclusion I want to turn to its other meaning: that of the body. Specifically that of the dead human body—the war dead—although the connection to a (non-living) body of text does not escape me. The dead continued to show up in every aspect of this research, even though their bodies were notably absent, and form an earie thread running across disciplines and field sites. This type of corpus is present in WWI writing, in remembrance and commemoration, in war, and in anti-war activism. In both groups the war dead are at the forefront of my interlocutors' minds. For the MGC/OCA the MGC war dead might have passed the centenary, but they remain the focus of commemoration. For VCNV the war dead are the not grievable in US and UK overseas warfare who are 'collateral damage'. Whether real or imagined, these dead come to us disembodied, distanced trough time (MGC) or space (in overseas war). These dead, this corpus, are effectively also canonical in their iteration on WWI memorials and in remembrance practices. The selection of my literary canon and my critical engagement with the selected works reinscribes and reiterates its importance. As Kermode asserts: 'every canon has a ghostly double of commentary, upon which its survival depends' (1988: 260). Through my interdisciplinary methodology, the reading of my literary corpus in conversation with multi-sited ethnography, this project has demonstrated the prolific presence of such commentaries. The way I engage with the corpus, the way Kathy engages with the corpus, the way the MGC/OCA engages with what is essentially a large corpus of dead bodies, these

are all interactions with, and commentaries on the canon of war, and what it means to have war dead (imaginary, as friends, kin, past, present, elsewhere, and as a society).

This thesis has drawn on different ways in which selected works a engage with WWI events, whereby their texts partially construct the 'memory' we now have of that conflict; be it through descriptions of sound, landscape, or the voices of their comrades and loved ones. To those who approach WWI through their kin connection, narratives, objects, and landscapes alike become parts of a commemorative practice. Fenella Cannell (2011) points out that family history (genealogical work) can be seen as a form of care for the dead (462). A form of care which offers the opportunity 'to re-make kinship relations with the departed' thereby enabling us to perform this care' (ibid). Cannell emphasises that our sense of self is relational and kinship-centred, which means that such family history work can tell us something about ourselves—or rather we allow it to tell us something about ourselves (2011: 474). It is this care for the dead which Judith and MGC/OCA members like her take on. The actions which constitute a national 'we' are acts of care. The people who build these narratives do so by repeatedly participating in these 'inflicted' events of which Crépon stated that they 'punctuate our political calendar with [their] most "sacred" dates' (2013: 1). That same commentary noted by Kermode is visible beyond its official inscription, as shown by the MGC/OCA addition of their own commemorative dates and events (see Chapter IV), and Maya's protest at the cenotaph (see Chapter I). Both these instances represent new beginnings as well as a continued engagement with the memory of war, of present wars, and the war dead.

Readers of WWI literature are forewarned of the element of death. Even should someone not have heard of WWI, one would be hard-pressed to find a combat novel without a trench scene on the covers. Immediately within the books in my corpus, the presence of death persists. Opening my copy of *All Quiet*, for example, death appears before any details of the novel are known. The preface reads:

> This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war. (1970: 5)

By the end of the novel this opening warning is all but forgotten. Remarque pledges his allegiance to the survivors of the war, while presenting us with a protagonist who dies.

The narrator of *All Quiet* is clearly not of that generation of men who escaped its shells, as he is killed at the end. Gasché's points out that 'Crépon notes, to live is always to live with—that is, to share life with others and, beyond their life, with the dead others in the memory of their life and death' (2013: xiii). There is still a sociality, morphed and mangled through war. The books of the corpus engage with this 'memory of their life and death' before the narratives even start. All are dedicated to the dead. To lovers, friends, comrades, soldiers: 'To R.A.L. and E.H.B. In Memory' (Brittain); 'Dedicated to PHILIP TOMLINSON. Wishing him a lasting Peace and myself his companionship in Peace or War' (Blunden); 'For the fallen' (Jünger); 'To the memory of the comrades who fell by my side at Crouÿ and on hill 199. January, May and September 1915' (Barbusse). Remarque was not alone in the notion that his generation was 'destroyed by the war even if they had managed to escape its shells' (1970: 5). The question of whether the war ever actually ends for those who fought in it comes to the fore specifically in the context of WWI, when so many soldiers developed unexplained nervous issues that a new word needed to be found for it (Gilbert and Gubar 1988: 258). The introduction of shell shock as a serious consequence of warfare—in some cases serious enough to be admitted instead of being sent back to the front—was not something that had happened before on this scale.

In reckoning with this proliferation of death, trauma theory provides a useful lens through which to view this trauma, loss, and haunting, especially in the context of wars and traumatic events (see Caruth 1996; LaCapra 2001). Within cultural memory studies, trauma theory might give us insights into how and why ex-soldiers and nurses have translated their experiences to the page. What is said and what is left silent become lines of inquiry. If this is true for the WWI veterans and their literature, this is also the case for VFP members, as well as for those who have encountered trauma in different ways. Several of the peace activists I encountered, and especially (but not exclusively) veteran peace activists seemed to struggle with trauma and/or PTSD. The ways in which they relied on their activist community— through conversation with others, but also through placing their bodies on the street in remembrance or protesting—meant that all the activists were in some way exposed to these experiences.

Members of VCNV and adjacent groups seemed to find a lot of comfort in the communal experience, sharing their stories and sometimes requesting conversation as part of that communal experience. This was especially the case in Chicago. Rather than seeking out mental health care (whether for socioeconomic, cultural, or other reasons), they turn to the activist community. This usually entails conversation about what happened, stories about the times they got arrested, what protests they have been present at, and who they met there. One such strand of conversation that seemed to hint towards trauma usually had to with past military service, or the military service of family members. The idea of choosing community over professional health care might in practice be quite taxing for those who do not suffer from mental health issues, and therefore end up sharing the burden of those who do (because they share their stories and emotions so explicitly). In Chicago, this seemed to fall along gendered lines, with the women ending up in more supporting roles—perhaps because they were less troubled by (overt) mental health problems, and the community responds to calls for help. Compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma were not discussed among the activists. However, it was something that came up when I was looking to explain what I was experiencing after my return from Chicago, and the literature suggests it is particularly prevalent among people in the human rights field and among advocacy groups (see Satterthwaite et al. 2019).

In their research on mental health risks in the human rights field Satterthwaite et al. (2019) point out how '[p]articipants reported that advocacy can often involve, or seemingly require, vicarious or direct exposure to human rights abuses, which can be potentially distressing or traumatic' (459). Satterthwaite et al. identify three modes of trauma, namely: direct trauma exposure which involves threats and harm, indirect trauma exposure which involves witnessing traumatic or distressing incidents, and vicarious trauma; the exposure to traumatic or distressing material. Before the pandemic, most of my interlocutors travelled to Afghanistan and Iraq regularly. These delegations always run risks, but on average (in most conflict zones) there will be fewer attacks on locals when there are foreigners present. Afghanistan delegations ceased shortly before I started fieldwork, as its violence had become so random that it had become too dangerous. Many of the stories that activists in the field shared with me, would place the activists under both direct trauma and vicarious trauma risk. This too, is an aspect of positionality; some people are more at risk of developing trauma responses than others, although there is no way of determining this

beforehand (there are only indicators). The emotional nature of the stories that were told, and the oftentimes repetitive and almost inescapable aspect of these narratives when you live in community with people who have made this their focus of life, was not always easy to navigate. However, it does seem like many long-standing activists are quite used to this aspect of sharing. Similar to the way Kathy utilises her affective responses to Brittain's writing, these stories from the field come across as the kind of narratives which give them the impetus to keep going (veterans or civilians sharing (telling) their stories are other examples). In some sense they need these narratives to continue their activism, as their position as activists from the UK and the US is that of people *not* under the strain of war. Rather, they engage in activism for and on the behalf of those who are.

War for people in those locales is ongoing, the consideration of which brings us back to the question of endings (see Chapter I), as for many of those with whom peace activism concerns itself, the end of war is far away and effectively fictional. Scarry (1985) asserts that the question of the duration of war partially lies in the duration of what she calls the 'contest activity' (112). This, too, is an issue of bodies and death. She considers war at its basis a contest between two parties in which the goal is to out-injure the other (Scarry 1985: 12). Once this activity is agreed to be over, this does not automatically mean the war is over, as demonstrated throughout this thesis. Scarry: 'What is remembered in the body is well remembered; the bodies of massive numbers of participants are deeply altered; those new alterations are carried forward into peace' (1985: 112-3). Cast in the solemn shape of memorials, the many war dead they commemorate might serve another purpose. As the different modes of interacting with the former battlefields of WWI have illustrated (see Chapter V), these sites and cemeteries engage visitors in the present. Barlow suggests that WWI cemeteries are instructive: 'Educationally, they aspire today to offer a lesson to future generations: the German cemetery at Vladslo, Belgium, carries the following quotation from Albert Schweitzer: "The soldiers' graves are the greatest preachers of peace"' (2013: 311).

Reality is altered by war; WWI might not be an ongoing war in the most direct sense (the fighting has stopped), but the soldiers are not released from it—nor is society at large. Memorialising and national remembrance further solidify the war narrative and the national identity, or 'we' it solidifies. In the end, this forms (has formed) a foundation from which living together or 'living with' in a society is able to continue (after so many of its own were considered disposable). Crépon insists that dying in war is 'death originating in murder',

viewing it is as a social construction within which many are implicated by these deaths (2013: xv). As Gasché emphasises: 'The French title of Marc Crépon's book, *Vivre avec*, interrogates "living with" oneself and others as mortal, as well as with the images of violent deaths of faceless human beings with which today's media regularly bombard us' (2013: viii-ix). What we are looking for then, essentially, is footing from which to continue, or begin again: some move forward in the context of this violent loss. For the MGC/OCA this lies in interacting with the memory of the MGC (war) dead, stories made visible through narratives such as displayed in my corpus. For VCNV, this footing is found in challenging the conditions that enable the 'violent deaths of faceless human beings' while reasserting that they are indeed grievable, and urging their governments to act in accordance.

Is this possible when the ghosts of the dead still wander among us? In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995) Jay Winter discusses the role of the supernatural as a (secular) way of dealing with grief, by way of the imagined return of the dead soldiers. George Johnson (2015) even places this type of individual mourning somewhat at odds with official remembrance. He states that 'mysticism and spiritualism [...], can in some instances represent a more ethical form of mourning (because intimately honoring [*sic*] the individuality of lost loved ones) than officially sanctioned representations of mourning such as war memorials' (17). The ghost or the spectral is a form that recurs throughout the various elements of my research. In *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (2008) Heonik Kwon explores the presence of (American) ghosts in Vietnam on the intersection of war deaths, displacement, and the social engagement with this testimony that exists in Vietnam (5). Kwon relates this to the experiences of WWI as well. As he explores: 'The idea that unknown fallen soldiers "wander between two worlds" is familiar to us as well as to the Vietnamese. It was popular in Europe in the aftermath of the Great War' (Kwon 2008: 26). Kwon continues:

> Between these two forms of kinship [social and biological] lie the reality of mechanical mass death and the consequent reality of universal and 'democratic' experience of grief—the postwar extension of kinship feelings to a wider circle is therefore partly a 'modern' phenomenon in the sense that it relates to the advanced destructive capacity of modern war. (2008: 85)

This extension of kinship feelings seems to reference remembrance practices that are practiced by whole nations (such as in the UK and France) as Crépon explores. Brittain's *Testament* keeps close to the personal or what Kwon would call 'biological' on the surface, but taps into an experience that was, at the very least in terms of loss and haunting, achingly familiar to many of her readers at the time. As Kwon's research suggests, there is also the option that the soldiers haunt the battlefields independently of those who mourn them, an explanation which leaves room for others (non-kin or veteran) to venture into those spaces and feel/become aware of their presence. It is, in that sense, an explanation which leaves space for engagement form people such myself and my 'Dutch perspective', and their seemingly misplaced or rootless interest in WWI. If the foundation is already laid, one only needs to step onto it. Completing the list of different bodies (of text; of my interlocutors; of soldiers) is my living body and positionality in the field.

Critically examining my positionality as 'other' or diasporic in the two fields (incidentally also bodies of research) has been an essential part of this project. As referenced throughout this thesis, the aspect of protesting, physically moving my body into the streets to make it visible for a certain cause, made me feel more at risk than I had anticipated, especially when contrasted with my interlocutors. But this difference also meant I was able to see the extent to which my protesting interlocutors felt themselves safe because I did not share this feeling. My own 'reading' was thus informed by an extra layer, informed by my diasporic identity. This previously mentioned 'gap' between our positionalities (would have) led to different actions (see Chapter II). The colonial legacies referenced in the Introduction, constitute a legacy that Sunder Rajan casts as the haunting ghosts of these histories, and my reading across disciplines is part of an ongoing body of critique which attempts to 'confront the ghosts' (2021: 175).

Future as Activism and Commemoration

After starting this thesis with the end, I want to end with the notion of beginning(s). As demonstrated, more than an ending, the armistice was rather 'the beginning of a process in which that experience was framed, institutionalized, given ideological content, and relived in political action as well as in fiction' (Leed 1979: xi; Bourke 19). As Crépon suggested, our judgement of past, present, and future, is haunted by war in the twentieth century (2013: 1;

see also Chapter I). It is the memory of the lives sacrificed which haunts us so, their importance replayed to and by us again and again through commemoration; they have become instruments of cohesion (ibid). This cohesion, the 'we' that is appealed to through the bodies—endings—of these fallen soldiers, gives the footing for political moves from truce to mobilisation.

Considering my literary corpus, the fieldwork with the MGC/OCA and VCNV, the instances I have found myself acting-with in activism and remembrance, they leave me with the feeling that perhaps the only true words about war are the names of those who have died in it. It is the only element which comes through untranslated: the names of comrades, dead or living. Their naming reasserts them as grievable people even if their death belied this fact. This assertion lies at the basis of in peace activism that focuses on civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. Maya's action at the Cenotaph in London, where she read out the names of killed British military and Afghan civilians (as detailed in Chapter I), is a poignant example of this. In this project, I effectively join in with this commemorative effort, sharing Wilfred's story, and reading and writing the names of some of the war dead. Writing war has proven to be a translation of experience, and in the transnational reach that the narratives of my corpus have, the only one element which comes through untranslated are the names of comrades dead or living. Commemoration and remembrance have not been this project's main aim, but it has become a side effect which I have come to find important through the work with my interlocutors and the way they have dedicated parts of their life to remembrance. These practices reject what is described in *Under Fire* (for any war):

> In reality, the soldier's sacrifice is obscurely concealed. The multitudes that make up the waves of attack have no reward. They run to hurl themselves into a frightful inglorious nothing. You cannot even heap up their names, their poor little names of nobodies. (Barbusse 1965: 377)

Commemorative effort gives the nameless dead back their proper names, which are written as they were in life, situating the dead in (a) history and suggesting a relation to the writer (of the names) in the present. While about the past, these practices are also decidedly future focussed.

Volumes such as *Memory and The Future* (Gutman et al. 2010) and *The Future as Cultural Fact* (Appadurai 2013) and others, research notions of 'the future' in cultural memory, providing valuable theoretical frameworks for analysis. Rigney calls for further exploration of the 'new research area' that is the cultural memory of protest (2018: 372). She follows Manuel Castells (2012) in stating that it is argued 'that outrage (regarding past injustice) and hope (regarding the future) make a powerful combination. The concept of outrage is closely linked to the idea of trauma in the sense that both are responses to [perceived] injustice' (Rigney 2018: 373). The regimental association members and the peace activists both look at the customs, policies, and social attitudes towards war and while the one looks back to WWI, the other looks to the current state of policy to stop present conflict and prevent future wars. These activists seek a disruption of a present that they consider to be heading towards a future that is repeating the past (i.e., war) and which created many victims among military and civilians alike. They are intent on not repeating the past, honouring it as traumatic and hurtful by committing themselves to not letting it happen again. Both groups are thus actively engaged with commemoration and the way the dead affect them presently. Emotions run no less high because the soldiers are already deceased—nor because these soldiers are personally unknown to the campaigners. The seeming main difference, which I have attempted to show is not truly a difference, is that regimental organisations are focussed on the past, while activists are focussed on the future. As Rigney contends: 'At first sight memory and activism may seem poles apart, with the former oriented towards the past and the latter towards the future. At second sight, however, they are deeply entangled' (2018: 371). Both practices are informed by the past in their present actions. One could even say that this perspective reveals activism as a mode of commemoration. The categories of activism and remembrance apply directly to the way in which the peace campaigners feel themselves to be interpellated by past events so they might shape a better future in the present and propel people to act politically. Seen through this lens, peace activism could be called memory activism. Ultimately, in this context, narratives are used for historical remembrance and commemoration in different ways, either aiding (remembrance) or challenging (peace activism) national narratives and rituals focussed on forming and maintaining a 'we'. While it seemed improbable that first time one of my interlocutors asked if I was a spy, it has been through the interdisciplinarity of this project that I have been able to draw connections such as these, ultimately coming together

in a myriad modes of engagement with and (re)reading of canonised WWI literature and memory which leads to (re)interpretation and action.

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Appendices

A. In Flanders Fields

BY JOHN MCCRAE

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
    That mark our place; and in the sky
    The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
    Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
        In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
    The torch; be yours to hold it high.
    If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
        In Flanders fields.

From: Poetry Foundation.

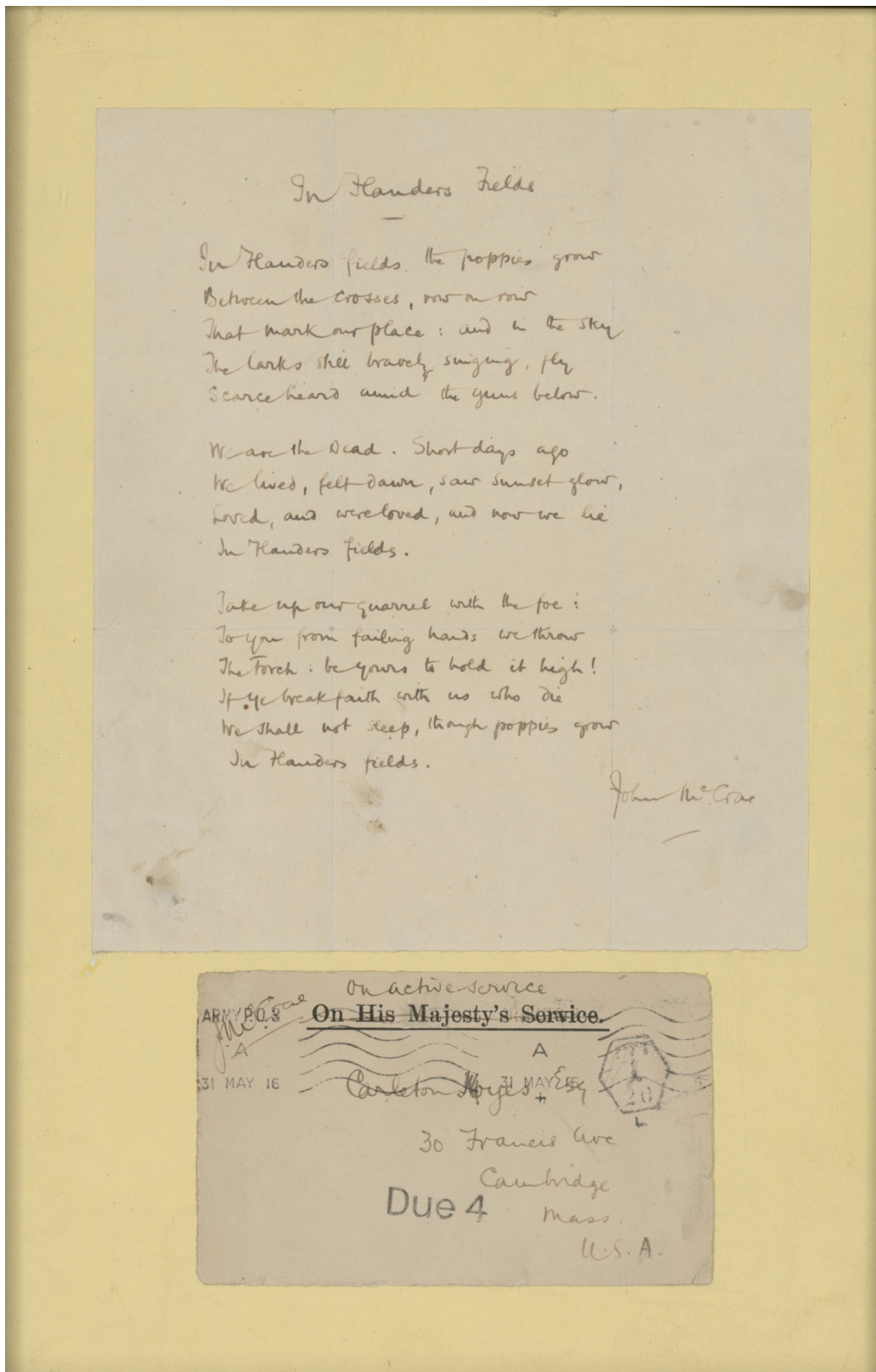**In Flanders Fields, Manuscript (front and back)**

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields, the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place: and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch: be yours to hold it high!
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae

On active service
On His Majesty's Service.
30 Francis Ave
Cambridge
Mass.
U.S.A.
Due 4

There are lots of trees and flowers
and the birds sing not all the
time : larks and nightingales
everywhere.
    Speaking of larks reminds me of
the enclosed — it has had a (I
say it modestly) surprising vogue,
and has been a good deal copied.
It came out in Punch last Decr..
and
    The mail is just ready, so I
abridge. My love to you both,
and I look forward to the happy
days when I shall see you.
                    Yours
                    Jack

From the digital archives McGill University Library, Montreal, Canada.

B. Private Edward BROWNBILL (fig. 2)

Edward Brownbill was born, enlisted and resided in Liverpool. He was the son of Edward & Mary Ann Brownbill, and the husband of Elizabeth, 80 Cornwall St, Netherfield Road, Liverpool.

He had enlisted as 33523 in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry and was transferred to the MGC about 4/9/1917, being sent to serve in France & Flanders with 49 Company. Early in March of 1918, 49 Coy was absorbed into the 16th Battalion MGC. He was taken prisoner of war, wounded in the thigh, on 21/3/1918 - the opening day of the German Spring offensive, from a position near Epehy in the Somme sector.

He was posted as "missing" in a War Office list of casualties published 14/5/1918, and his death was later notified to the International Red Cross by the German authorities. A notice was published in the Liverpool Express of 19/9/1918: "….died on July 8th in Germany, was wounded and taken POW of March 21st 1918. He was 30 years of age. He leaves a widow and two children at 80 Cornwall Street. Before joining the army he was employed by Macfies, sugar refiners, Liverpool"

Edward's remains lie today in Hamburg War Cemetery, Plot IV, Row E, Grave 15. He was later reported as having died of wounds in a further War Office list of 26/11/1918.

Source: Sacker, Graham. *Machine Gun Corps Database* (n/a)

C. Sgt Henry Reginald BARKER (fig. 3)

Sgt Henry Reginald BARKER, 148061, 32 Bn MGC (previously 4555 York & Lancaster Regt) Died of wounds, aged 25, received during the final weeks of the war, at his home 32 Horne Street, Wakefield, West Yorks. Transferred to the MGC between 17-28/4/1918 in the field. Left a widow, Emilie Annie Barker and two children: Dorothy Day Maureen Barker, born 8/10/1914 and Maria Barker born 27/12/1916.

Mrs Barker received a grant of £7 on 15/1/1919 (equivalent of £1956 in today's terms), a further grant of £2 on 23/5/1919 (worth £559 today) and from 7/7/1919 a weekly pension of £1/7/11d (equivalent to £390 today).

The grave is an example showing that not all headstones are of the usual CWGC pattern. Sergt Barker's name was added to an existing family memorial and can be found in Knottingley Cemetery, Wakefield just a stone's throw from his home in Horne Street and is today accepted as an official war grave. I took the photograph about 1998 when I was looking for my grandfather's family home, also in Horne Street, Wakefield. The two families may well have known one another.

Source: Sacker, Graham. *Machine Gun Corps Database* (n/a)

D. Private William Edward GAWN (fig. 4)

101588 William Edward GAWN, born Wealdstone, Middx, enlisted at Maidstone as 1609 3/1st West Kent Yeomanry. Transferred to the MGC(Cavalry) about 25/4/1917 and posted to East Africa. His unit identity is unknown - why a cavalryman should have been serving in Africa is a complete mystery.

He died, apparently, in the European Government Hospital in Zanzibar, of dysentery, on 13/12/1917 and today lies in Dar-es-Salaam War Cemetery, Tanzania Plot 1, Row A, grave 3. He was the husband of Nellie Gawn, of 5 Sartor Rd, Newlands, Peckham Rye, leaving three children: Arthur William b 20/1/1911, Walter Leonard b 2/12/1912 and Edgar Basil b 15/5/1914. Mrs Gawn received a £5 grant and subsequently a weekly pension of £1/9/7d.

Source: Sacker, Graham. *Machine Gun Corps Database* (n/a)

E. Letter dated 12-4-1918; Wilfred Prew is Wounded

B.E.F.

France,

12 - 4 - 18.

Dear Mrs Prew,

With deepest sorrow I write to
say that your husband has been very seriously
wounded. He was brought to this casualty
clearing station last night with a bad
wound in the chest, caused by a sniper's
bullet. He is receiving all the skill and
care that human heart and mind are
capable of. Be assured of that. He doesn't
suffer much pain and is quite conscious
and talks easily, but is extremely weak
I shall. D.v. write you again tomorrow.
May God, in whom you trust – as your
husband tells me – be your support in these
moments of terrible anxiety and may He,
the Great Physician, be at your dear
husbands bedside It is my humble prayer now
yours in deepest sympathy,
Duncan MacDonald (chaplain)
23ʳᵈ C.C.S.

12-4-18

Dear Mrs Prew,

      With deepest sorrow I write to say that your husband has been very seriously wounded. He was brought to this casualty clearing station last night with a bad wound in the chest, caused by a sniper's bullet. He is receiving all the skill and care that human heart and mind are capable of. Be assured of that. He doesn't suffer much pain and is quite conscious and talks easily, but is extremely weak.

I shall D.V. [Deo Volente] write to you again tomorrow.

May God, in whom you trust - as your husband tells me - be your support in these moments of terrible anxiety and may He, the Great Physician, be at your dear husband's bedside. It is my humble prayer now. Yours in deepest sympathy,

Duncan MacDonald (Chaplain)

23rd C.C.S.

F. Highways Act 1980: Obstruction of highways and streets

137   Penalty for wilful obstruction

(1) If a person, without lawful authority or excuse, in any way wilfully obstructs the free passage along a highway he is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding £50.

(2) A constable may arrest without warrant any person whom he sees committing an offence against this section.

Source: 'Highways Act 1980: Obstruction of highways and streets', *The National Archives* (n/a) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/part/IX/crossheading/obstruction-of-highways-and-streets/enacted?view=plain> [accessed 24 January 2023]

G. Necessity (Duress of Circumstances)

An act, which would otherwise be a crime, may in some cases be excused if the defendant can show that:

(a) it was done only to avoid consequences which could not otherwise be avoided and which if they had followed, would have inflicted upon him, or upon others whom he was bound to protect, inevitable and irreparable evil;

(b) that no more was done than was reasonably necessary for that purpose; and

(c) that the evil inflicted by it was not disproportionate to the evil avoided.

Source: 'Necessity (Duress of Circumstances)', *The Crown Prosecution Service* (n/a). <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/defences-duress-and-necessity> [accessed 24 January 2023]

H. Mary A. Wright's resignation letter

March 21, 2003

The following is a copy of Mary (Ann) Wright's letter of resignation to Secretary of State Colin Powell. Wright was most recently the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. She helped open the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, in January 2002.

U.S. Embassy

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

March 19, 2003

Secretary of State Colin Powell

US Department of State

Washington, DC 20521

Dear Secretary Powell:

When I last saw you in Kabul in January, 2002 you arrived to officially open the US Embassy that I had helped reestablish in December, 2001 as the first political officer. At that time I could not have imagined that I would be writing a year later to resign from the Foreign Service because of US policies. All my adult life I have been in service to the United States. I have been a diplomat for fifteen years and the Deputy Chief of Mission in our Embassies in Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan (briefly) and Mongolia. I have also had assignments in Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Grenada and Nicaragua. I received the State Department's Award for Heroism as Charge d'Affaires during the evacuation of Sierra Leone in 1997. I was 26 years in the US Army/Army Reserves and participated in civil reconstruction projects after military operations in Grenada, Panama and Somalia. I attained the rank of Colonel during my military service.

This is the only time in my many years serving America that I have felt I cannot represent the policies of an Administration of the United States. I disagree with the Administration's policies on Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, North Korea and curtailment of civil liberties in the U.S. itself. I believe the Administration's policies are making the world a more dangerous, not a safer, place. I feel obligated morally and professionally to set out my

very deep and firm concerns on these policies and to resign from government service as I cannot defend or implement them.

I hope you will bear with my explanation of why I must resign. After thirty years of service to my country, my decision to resign is a huge step and I want to be clear in my reasons why I must do so.

I disagree with the Administration's policies on Iraq

I wrote this letter five weeks ago and held it hoping that the Administration would not go to war against Iraq at this time without United Nations Security Council agreement. I strongly believe that going to war now will make the world more dangerous, not safer.

There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is a despicable dictator and has done incredible damage to the Iraqi people and others of the region. I totally support the international community's demand that Saddam's regime destroy weapons of mass destruction.

However, I believe we should not use US military force without UNSC agreement to ensure compliance. In our press for military action now, we have created deep chasms in the international community and in important international organizations. Our policies have alienated many of our allies and created ill will in much of the world.

Countries of the world supported America's action in Afghanistan as a response to the September 11 Al Qaida attacks on America. Since then, America has lost the incredible sympathy of most of the world because of our policy toward Iraq. Much of the world considers our statements about Iraq as arrogant, untruthful and masking a hidden agenda. Leaders of moderate Moslem/Arab countries warn us about predicable outrage and anger of the youth of their countries if America enters an Arab country with the purpose of attacking Moslems/Arabs, not defending them. Attacking the Saddam regime in Iraq now is very different than expelling the same regime from Kuwait, as we did ten years ago.

I strongly believe the probable response of many Arabs of the region and Moslems of the world if the US enters Iraq without UNSC agreement will result in actions extraordinarily dangerous to America and Americans. Military action now without UNSC agreement is much more dangerous for America and the world than allowing the UN weapons inspections to proceed and subsequently taking UNSC authorized action if warranted.

I firmly believe the probability of Saddam using weapons of mass destruction is low, as he knows that using those weapons will trigger an immediate, strong and justified international response. There will be no question of action against Saddam in that case. I strongly disagree with the use of a "preemptive attack" against Iraq and believe that this preemptive attack policy will be used against us and provide justification for individuals and groups to "preemptively attack" America and American citizens.

The international military build-up is providing pressure on the regime that is resulting in a slow, but steady disclosure of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). We should give the weapons inspectors time to do their job. We should not give extremist Moslems/ Arabs a further cause to hate America, or give moderate Moslems a reason to join the extremists. Additionally, we must reevaluate keeping our military forces in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Their presence on the Islamic "holy soil" of Saudi Arabia will be an anti-American rally cry for Moslems as long as the US military remains and a strong reason, in their opinion, for actions against the US government and American citizens.

Although I strongly believe the time in not yet right for military action in Iraq, as a soldier who has been in several military operations, I hope General Franks, US and coalition forces can accomplish the missions they will be ordered do without loss of civilian or military life and without destruction of the Iraqi peoples' homes and livelihood.

I strongly urge the Department of State to attempt again to stop the policy that is leading us to military action in Iraq without UNSC agreement. Timing is everything and this is not yet the time for military action.

I disagree with the Administration's lack of effort in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Likewise, I cannot support the lack of effort by the Administration to use its influence to resurrect the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As Palestinian suicide bombers kill Israelis and Israeli military operations kill Palestinians and destroy Palestinian towns and cities, the Administration has done little to end the violence. We must exert our considerable financial influence on the Israelis to stop destroying cities and on the Palestinians to curb its youth suicide bombers. I hope the Administration's long-needed "Roadmap for Peace" will have the human resources and political capital needed to finally make some progress toward peace.

I disagree with the Administration's lack of policy on North Korea

Additionally, I cannot support the Administration's position on North Korea. With weapons, bombs and missiles, the risks that North Korea poses are too great to ignore. I strongly believe the Administration's lack of substantive discussion, dialogue and engagement over the last two years has jeopardized security on the peninsula and the region. The situation with North Korea is dangerous for us to continue to neglect.

I disagree with the Administration's policies on Unnecessary Curtailment of Rights in America Further, I cannot support the Administration's unnecessary curtailment of civil rights following September 11. The investigation of those suspected of ties with terrorist organizations is critical but the legal system of America for 200 years has been based on standards that provide protections for persons during the investigation period. Solitary confinement without access to legal counsel cuts the heart out of the legal foundation on which our country stands. Additionally, I believe the Administration's secrecy in the judicial process has created an atmosphere of fear to speak out against the gutting of the protections on which America was built and the protections we encourage other countries to provide to their citizens.

Resignation

I have served my country for almost thirty years in the some of the most isolated and dangerous parts of the world. I want to continue to serve America. However, I do not believe in the policies of this Administration and cannot defend or implement them. It is with heavy heart that I must end my service to America and therefore resign due to the Administration's policies.

Mr. Secretary, to end on a personal note, under your leadership, we have made great progress in improving the organization and administration of the Foreign Service and the Department of State. I want to thank you for your extraordinary efforts to that end. I hate to leave the Foreign Service, and I wish you and our colleagues well.

Very Respectfully,

Mary A. Wright, FO-01

Deputy Chief of Mission

US Embassy

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

From: www.govexec.com/defense/2003/03/mary-a-wrights-resignation-letter/13704

I. Colonel Ann Wright on Fox News

Source: Youtube

Title: "BILL O'REILLY and COLONEL ANN WRIGHT"

Link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OzjMayGiu4

J. Ethical Clearance

University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

7 March 2019

Thalia Ostendorf
Department of Social Anthropology

Dear Thalia,

Thank you for submitting your ethical application which was considered at the School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee meeting on 7 March 2019 when the following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Application Form
2. Participant Information Sheet
3. Consent Form
4. Debriefing Form

The School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Films Studies Ethics Committee has been delegated to act on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) and has granted this application ethical approval. The particulars relating to the approved project are as follows -

Approval Code:	SA14145	Approved on:	7 March 2019	Approval Expiry:	7 March 2024
Project Title:	Readers of WW1 Literature and Contemporary Peace Activism				
Researcher(s):	Thalia Ostendorf				
Supervisor(s):	Dr Adam Reed, Dr Elodie Laugt				

Approval is awarded for five years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the five year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application form, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit an ethical amendment form for review.

…1/2

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School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee
Department of Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews, 71 North Street, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9AL
Tel: (01334)462977. Email: socanthadmin@st-andrews.ac.uk

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K. Ethical Clearance Amendment

University of St Andrews | FOUNDED 1413

School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee

02 June 2020

Thalia Ostendorf
Department of Modern Languages/Department of Social Anthropology

Dear Thalia

Thank you for submitting your ethical amendment application.

The School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee has approved this ethical amendment application:

Original Approval Code:	SA14145	Original Approval Date:	7/3/19
Amendment Approval Date:	25/5/20	Approval Expiry Date:	6/3/24
Project Title:	Readers of WWI Literature and Contemporary Peace Activism		
Researcher(s):	Thalia Ostendorf	Supervisor/PI:	Dr Elodie Laugt/Dr Adam Reed
School/Unit:	Social Anthropology, School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies		

This approval does not extend the originally granted approval period. If you require an extension to the approval period, you can write to your School Ethics Committee who may grant a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months. For longer extensions, or for any further changes, you must submit an additional ethical amendment application. For all extensions, you should inform the School Ethics Committee when your study is complete.

You must report any serious adverse events, or significant changes not covered by this approval, related to this study immediately to the School Ethics Committee.

Approval is given on the following conditions:
- that you conduct your research in line with:
    - the details provided in your ethical amendment application (and the original ethical application where still relevant)
    - the University's Principles of Good Research Conduct
    - the conditions of any funding associated with your work
- that you obtain all applicable additional documents (see the 'additional documents' webpage for guidance) before research commences.

You should retain this approval letter with your study paperwork.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Stavroula Pipyrou
Convener of the School Ethics Committee

cc. Dr Elodie Laugt/Dr Adam Reed

School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee
Chair: Dr Stavroula Pipyrou Telephone: 01334 461960 Email: sp78@st-andrews.ac.uk
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L. 'Choose Your Own Protest'

Source: Ostendorf, Thalia. 2022. 'Choose Your Own Protest'. *jaune, geel, gelb, yellow. Monochrome* by Antonis Pittas, eds. Lisa Bakker, Eleonoor Jap Sam (Prinsenbeek: Jap Sam Books), pp. 31-73

Choose Your Own Protest

Thalia Ostendorf

Choose Your Own Protest
Thalia Ostendorf

1 December 2018

The yellow vests come to you mediated, delayed. Where you live is isolated. Your work at this stage folds you into yourself and demands all your time. This particular afternoon you go and get a burger at the one place in town that sells them. Your friends are there, one of them is in tears. She is from France and her brother is a paramedic in Paris. He is sending her updates about the protests and what is going on for him. You and your friends try and tell her that he will be fine, but this doesn't seem to be her main concern. What you remember afterwards – you were hungry, not that attentive, not fully grasping what was going on – is that she said there were too many people getting hurt. Too many people that needed an ambulance and medical attention, and so he and his co-workers had to choose. Who is more worthy of medical care? The old lady that got caught in the crossfire or the young guy that started shit? Vandalised buildings, went after the police? (These are the options she presents you with.) The French girl was upset because her brother was there to help people, and shouldn't be put in such a position, shouldn't be made to choose who deserved care more. Or maybe she saw the order of her world and all things in it collapse while she wasn't even there. You wonder if her brother hesitated, what kind of choices were made. If he helped civilians before police. You are mildly relieved these are not your choices to make. That your opinion isn't asked.

As you read up about this many weeks later, away from your work, it becomes clear that the briefing you received in the burger bar is anything but accurate. Specifically on the count of police violence. One list you find sums up: at least 94 people have been seriously injured, 24 have been blinded in one eye – sometimes losing their eye altogether, 283 sustained head injuries, 4 have lost hands, someone died while she was at her window and a tear gas canister hit her. The police are the only ones that have those, or the rubber bullets that punctured people's eyes. One young man who had come to Paris from his hometown for the protests describes how he was calling his mother, telling her he was fine, when he suddenly found himself on the ground. A rubber bullet had hit him in the eye, blinding him on the right. When you see someone lying on the ground like that, do you wonder if he deserved it? As an MT, do you just help? Or do you pause? Or ...? You wonder.

Although the first you heard of it was when the protests hit Paris, they actually do not originate in the capital. The yellow safety vests that were chosen as the unifying thread by the people in rural areas that were primarily protesting fuel taxes weren't an investment for any of those original protestors. They did not need to be bought new: French motorists are required to carry them in their cars by law.

The yellow ended up visually unifying a movement that spanned the political spectrum. Some of the issues the movement has gathered momentum on are the erosion of people's purchasing power, the widening of the wealth gap (President Macron abolished

the wealth tax for the extremely rich almost as soon as he took office) and most prominently, sparking the protests: further taxes on fuel. Especially people in rural areas, dependent on their cars in their everyday lives – and without the public transport of a city like Paris – took offence. And took to the streets. Its original ties to the car users that were protesting loosened as the movement swelled, and the yellow remained its marker as the movement swiftly called down anyone that could be signalled as a leader. The protests remained neon yellow, non-hierarchical actions, played out in acts.

The proper translation of gilets jaunes – not the literal one – is actually 'safety vests', not yellow vests. It is entirely possible that this was an honest mistake by the first foreign news agents that picked it up, as people hardly ever think of proper translations, but it feels a lot like providence intervening. That a movement that turned violent is not called 'safety vests' as it travelled across the European mainland can only be called a lucky coincidence. Was it a conscious choice, to define the movement by its colour rather than the proper name of the object? It might never have travelled as far as it did if it was called the safety vest movement.

Later, when you try to go back to work, your mind is still with the protests in France. Images of aggressively bright yellow flicker behind your eyes even as you close them. As these protests rage, because they haven't stopped, the protests of 1968 have, inevitably, come up in conversations and news reports.

You wonder about the connections.

You are reminded of the first time you were at a protest.

You find out that 'non-lethal hand-held weapons' or 'LBD40' are responsible for all these injuries and decide to investigate.

The strongest visuals of the protests and general strike of May 1968, interior to France in any case, is not a colour (although connections to communist red are drawn), but a movement, an action, an obstacle in the streets. Images are conjured up of Paris' streets laid bare, the exposed sand underneath the cobblestones that were taken out and built up as a barricade. Students behind them, some haphazard desks from the university buildings stacked on top – their slogan 'below the streets, the beach' brought to life. There is angry poetry in there. The movement of taking the stuff from under your feet to build a structure that blocks whatever was going on, whatever was using those stones before – people, cars, police – cannot pass over them now. What happened exactly is messy, comes from various sides at once and many an analysis ignores a side or two. Students took to the streets in protest, and a strike of unionized labourers without initial authorization (or approval, or support) of their unions, joined. This 'wildcat general strike' was the first of its kind France ever saw. It is estimated that between 11 and 22% of the country's labourers went on strike and violent protests erupted. De Gaulle fled the country. The protests acted in opposition to a government which eventually called new elections – and De Gaulle and his party came out with a landslide victory. With more support than before. What was that months-and-a-bit that 1968 was all about? You used to know exactly what, when you were at university, and the notion of protest and the sand beneath the pavement had such a pull on all you while the idea of protesting yourself

barely entered anyone's mind. Not in those circles anyway. It was the idea that mattered. And the talk. And the beer.

The whiff you distinguish this time around, is the fear of the government. How afraid they must have been for the strike, for another commune, another revolution – all thinking back to memories that are not their bodies' own. Fearing for another full-scale revolution – as undoubtedly was the case with the yellow vests. If there is no king to kill anymore, who is next in line?

Ten days after you first hear of the yellow vests, they erect a guillotine in Paris, bearing the name of Macron's political party. You zoom in on the grainy pictures. The blade doesn't seem real. The point is made regardless.

Talk of barricades invariably leads to the Paris Commune. That brief window of time in 1871 when the revolutionary socialist government of that name controlled Paris before it met its bloody end – by the hand of the still-ruling French government. France has a way of tying any civil disobedience or grand-scale strike to the last, finishing with the Paris Commune and, ultimately, always, with the French Revolution. Not just France itself, or French people – although they have a way of reminding you they're the ones that beheaded their own king – but other Europeans that think of France as well. Internationally televised strikes make sense to us, we've 'seen' this before, from these people. In another body, in another time. How they, not long after the revolution, accepted and embraced an emperor is more or less forgotten, just as the huge stretches of land across oceans that

were taken and ruled by France, or the people subjugated and made to work in them.

When you think of revolution, you first think of

France.

Haiti.

Behind a large conference centre in London, a truck slows down because it has to. There are people in the street, blocking its way. When it slows the people clamber onto the truck, they try to crawl on top of the large wooden crate that is strapped to the back, already half slipping on their way up. They never quite get on top. Although it slowed down, the truck never stopped, and the people never get a proper footing in the few seconds of lulled and slowed movement. People stumble and fall off as the truck moves on.

The Arms Fair comes to town once every two years, and this year you are part of it. There are seven days of protest that are meant to stop the trucks with material entering the fairground. You are told that the protests used to happen during the fair but since the demos have never actually resulted in the termination of the event, that became a bit too depressing for the protesters. You silently agree. Trying to stop weapons being sold while people continue to walk into the place to buy weapons... it's trying to make difference while being told you won't. People there treat the weapons fair, where things are sold that are unabashedly meant and marketed to kill people, with no more emotion than you would a holiday fair with the latest all-inclusive deals.

Organized protests have now moved to the week leading up to the fair and focus on trying to stop the weapons from entering the premises. There aren't many trucks driving down this way but when they do show up, people will stand, sit, lie in the road, attempt to climb the crates or exposed tanks or helicopters that sometimes drive onto the terrain. It makes for great photos.

Not a single truck was stopped in your time there. Police presence is overwhelming; they form a much larger crowd than the peace protesters. Many protesters are arrested for their unsuccessful attempts to stop said trucks. Some never get that far. You see one woman standing in the empty road, blind to the police officer that is running at her at full speed from behind. He barrels into her, forcefully picks her up, and drops her on the grassy patch next to the road. It takes a second or two and it is clear she hasn't seen his face, only the cuffs of his uniform. She is visibly shaken.

About four hours into the protest, you look around, spot only one familiar face. That person confirms what you were expecting: while you were walking around, looking at the goings-on, the four others you arrived with have all gotten arrested. You are told that they went off in pairs and locked on.

You know what locked on means.

You don't know what locked on means.

French riot police have been using 'non-lethal hand-held weapons (the LBD40)' against the people in the yellow vest movement and has been highly criticized for it. 'Defence ball launchers' is another term for it, or 'less-lethal weapons', or 'less-than-lethal weapons', whatever that may mean. Or 'non-deadly weapons', or 'compliance weapons', or 'hand-held rubber bullet launchers', or 'pain-inducing weapons'. Can-kill-a-living-target-but-are-not-specifically-designed-for-it seems to summarize it. Less seems to be the operative word here. Could you call them 'less effective weapons'? You wonder.

When tracing the origins of the use of these weapons in France, the word 'urban' pops up. The police wanted to use it in 'urban' areas without potentially or accidentally killing people, but in accidentally those 'urban' spaces – specifically the banlieues, predominantly inhabited by people of colour – they have been used in order to maintain social control. In 2005 there were protests there against inequality and police brutality, although such nuance gets lost in how the media talks about these specific spaces and bodies. When the protests in 2005 were going on then-President Sarkozy described the protesters as racaille, scum. So, depending on your perspective, 'crowd control' sounds an awful lot like 'terrorizing', but said… politely. In the UK, Germany and Belgium these types of weapons are no longer used for crowd control. They are still used in Spain and have resulted in numerous injuries during protests for Catalan independence.

The LBD40 is the latest model of this type

of less-lethal weapon that is used by the police during riots in France. It is equipped with an electronic aiming device and fires a 40 mm foam projectile weighing 95 grams, which is said to be 'effective' at up to 30 metres. Official advice put out by the French police is that it should not be used within 10 metres of the target. Already a decade ago in Marseille, someone by the name of Mustapha Ziani died as a result of being hit in the chest with such a projectile that was fired by police from less than five metres away during an altercation with the police. During the yellow vests protests the French police have said that their response is 'proportional'. Someone on the left of the political spectrum has called the police violence during protests the physical response of the state machine. One protester remembers the police facing them, behind their shields, and thinking that they could not be aiming at him because he did not think of himself as a target. He was wrong, his perspective not caught up, and lost his right eye.

The French yellow vests are originally not from one particular political corner, their make-up is quite mixed, but they are predominantly white. You wonder if part of the outrage over police violence stems from a feeling of violation because they are now the ones targeted, losing hands and eyes while there is arguably nothing 'urban' about them. They have flocked from the provinces to the capital of their centralized country and feel unheard, yes, but not necessarily in solidarity with others that feel that way. One thing political commentators keep mentioning is how non-hierarchical the movement is, and how this is interesting but how it also convolutes their argument as their demands kept piling up even as the government made concessions. With all these rising demands some are called to and away from the movement, but it is quite clear people of colour remain under-represented in that conversation. Interestingly, worryingly, there were some cases in which the banlieues were accused of starting the yellow vest movement. Troublemakers look a certain way, don't they?

You wonder how these less-lethal weapons can do such damage. What are the rules, how and when are police allowed to use them? What is the code of conduct?

You inevitably think of others that lost much more than a hand or an eye for doing much less, especially in the US, which has been all over the news for years.

On the 'Faith Day the faith-based groups show up. The Catholic workers you arrived with have locked on and have been carried off after they were extracted from their arm locks. The Quakers seem to be the biggest group present. They appear to be a homogenous group which is almost entirely made up of white people. Pacifism is one of the main principles of their faith and their mode of worship is to sit in silence, together. There is no sermon, and you cannot really call it prayer because you are not obliged to pray or think anything. Normally they gather at their place of worship – the Friends House – but during protest they do something different. They use their worship as a strategy. People will go and sit in the road, on the asphalt, blocking the road the trucks are trying to take. When the police remove them, after repeatedly asking them if they will get up and get out of the way because they will be arrested if they do not, they go and get arrested. Their arrest is on the charge that the protesters are blocking a highway. The way the arrested Quakers counter this in court is that the police were interrupting an act of worship, which is illegal.

Something happens in the crowd that day when everyone gets arrested. Say you have always had some issues with authority, or perhaps you never had any, you like having clarity. What is allowed, what is not allowed? What will keep me safe, what will not? Perhaps you never had this luxury, of thinking yourself safe when faced with authority, with the police, because of the way they look at your face. Either way, you are at the protest and this big group of Quakers refuses to get out of the road. In the buildings ahead of them weapons will be sold, 'battlefield-tested' weapons as one Israeli company boasts, and they are stubborn, too calm to be angry. But you are getting angry. Several police officers have come up to you in an attempt to be friendly. You were forewarned not to talk to them, as there are intelligence officers among them. You dislike their saccharine-friendly attempts and meanwhile, as the arrests start, you have the distinct feeling they are arresting the wrong people. In front of you an 80-year-old woman is getting arrested, she refuses to get up. She understands what he is telling her, yes. The policeman seems reluctant to arrest her. One of many ironies is how nice he is to her, and how his specific department is known for racial profiling and violence. They constantly end up in the news for it. Another irony is that the police form a far more diverse crowd than the peace protesters.

Whenever someone gets arrested people clap and call out after them: 'thank you friend!'

There is no danger here.

You think of a rather impromptu protest you were at, in a big American city.

You think of the time you were at an annually returning in a big American city.

Locking on is something that has to be prac-
tised. You cannot assume it will go right
straight away. It usually involves two people
who put their arm stuck in a tube all the way
up to the shoulder. The tube has been rein-
forced with concrete, chains, wire, and the like.
They will put their arms in the tube and 'lock
on' to something inside that they can't undo
themselves. Handcuffs perhaps; one on the
wrist another on a metal rod on the inside of
the tube. Then they fall to the ground, before
the police can stop them. Blocking the road
with their bodies. The most extreme form of
locking on is to take a D-lock, usually used
for bikes, and attach yourself to some fence
or other – by the neck.

You must know your government well to
do that. And the police. You must know your-
self safe to do that. Or rather, you must know
that although the police might rough you up
– because this seems inevitable – they value
your life enough to not break your arm, your
shoulder, your neck. Or they dread the bad
press and public outrage enough to not break
your bones because of how your body and
your life are valued, even when it is chained
to something.

No-one that day locks on by the neck. They
do lock on with their arms, the next two people
even lock on while the lock – and their arms –
are in a car and they are outside on either end
of it. While they do this

you feel that you could lock on in the road
during a protest and know yourself safe,
living to make your point the next day.

you feel that the police would not respect
your body and your life like that.

The parameters of the French Revolution are clear enough. There were a king and a queen and they lounged in their rightful places in society. That is, at the very top. Subject to, yes, gossip and gambling and probably the bad smells in Versailles, but nothing we would call serious. No hunger, no cold. Clothes, food, shelter, endless, endless entertainment when you wish it; the latest, newest luxuries from the colonies. Then there were the inhabitants of the country, who were going hungry, cold, who were getting fed up with this God-given right to everything the royals and their peers called forth. They had already revolutionized the death penalty – beheading used to be the privilege of the aristocracy and the poor were hung or otherwise tortured to death; such scenes no longer. Execution parties would be much more egalitarian, not just in form but, as it turns out, also in subject.

They say it began with bread – hunger – and taxation. Bread was scarce but scarcity was not even needed; it was so expensive that its supply was available only to very few. Let's say Marie Antoinette did hear the people's call for bread, and let's say her reply was indeed 'let them eat cake'. Or brioche. True or not, this wordy snapshot is the perfect illustration of why it was felt Marie Antoinette's punishment should be death. To figure out if she really said it places the focus back on her – one of the most talked-about (or dare we call it gossiped-about) women in history – rather than on the people that experienced her as quite that detached. Who were that deprived and unheard. People took to the streets and forcefully tried to end the hierarchies that ruled their lives; people died, new governments were formed, a king and queen lost their heads.

The ideals of the American revolution, which were supported by the French royals, ironically enough, made its way into France through the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen'. General Lafayette, who drafted key points, was known to work with his friend Thomas Jefferson.

Seventeen articles about liberty, taxes, property and the power of the nation came out of this. Women are conspicuously absent from this notion of 'men' as were enslaved Africans of any gender, children, and foreigners. Really being an active citizen also excluded servants so you were really only left with 'active citizens': French male landowners over the age of 25. The women's clubs that tried to move women out of their 'passive citizenship' were there and petitioned for equal rights but were forcefully dismantled by the Jacobin revolutionaries. Revolutionary ideals were to take a masculine shape and the hatred for Marie Antoinette and what was seen as her political meddling aided that point. Although, it must be said, some things did change; before the revolution women were underaged individuals in the eyes of the law.

Inspired by the French other European countries such as Ireland, Italy, and Sicily had their revolutions and in spite of slavery not being mentioned in the articles at all, the written call for liberty had been loud enough to be heard in the colonies.

The French Revolution inevitably leads to

the Haitian Revolution.

I said inevitably.

Internal Security Code

Legislative part (Articles L111-1 to L898-1).
>
Book II: Public Order And Security (Articles L211-1 to L288-2)
>>
Title I: Public Order (Articles L211-1 to L214-4)
>>>
Chapter I: Prevention of public order breaches at demonstrations and gatherings (Articles L211-1 to L211-16)
>>>>
Section 3: Unlawful assembly (Articles L211-9 to L211-10)
>>>>>

Article L211-9
Created by Order number 2012-351 of 12 March 2012 – Annex, Initial version.

An unlawful assembly, within the meaning of Article 431-3 of the Penal Code, may be dispersed by the forces of public order after two orders to disperse have been issued without effect by the following officers, while bearing the insignia of their office:

1° The State representative of the local department or, in Paris, the prefect of police;
2° Paris excepted, the mayor or one of his/her deputies;
3° Any judicial police officer in charge of public safety or any other judicial police officer.

These orders are made in such a way as to inform the persons taking part in the unlawful

assembly of the obligation to disperse without delay.

However, the representatives of the forces of public order called to disperse an unlawful assembly may directly resort to the use of force, where acts of violence and of assault and battery are carried out against them or if they are not in a position otherwise to protect the place they are occupying.

The manner of applying the above paragraphs shall be specified by a Decree of the Conseil d'État, which shall also determine the insignia to be borne by the persons referred to under items 1–3 as well as the conditions governing the use of firearms to uphold public order.

You are reminded of the first time you were at a protest.

You think of more violent police conduct, especially in the US, body-cam footage of which has been gathered for less than a decade.

The French called for liberty, equality, and fraternity, and the call was heard further and wider than they imagined. An answer from such distance, from such people was not what they imagined either. But an answer came.

The Africans enslaved on the French colony of Haiti, then Saint-Domingue, produced almost half of the world's coffee and more sugar than any other place on Earth. They produced more sugar than all of the English colonies combined. The import of enslaved Africans was going on at a frenzied pace in Saint-Domingue. Calculations show Saint-Domingue responsible for a third of the transatlantic slave trade. The population numbers together with the numbers of enslaved people brought in by boat show how these people were worked to death over Europe's latest luxury goods. For they are not essentials, let's not forget. From 1764, between 10,000 and 28,000 people were shipped there – per year. From 1787, even more than 40,000 per year followed that route, arriving on the island. People were worked to death on the sugar and coffee plantations, life expectancy was short, and a constant resupply of labour was needed. Buying people new proved cheaper than keeping them alive.

Some argue that this constant arrival of newly-enslaved people made the island such fertile ground for revolution. There were still such strong, direct ties to another life for so many. They had experienced a tidal change in life already, and perhaps most importantly, had experience with tactical warfare in Africa. In what was to be Haiti the enslaved outnumbered the white planters ten to one. Those

white people purported natural dominance as though they were both the divinely appointed kings and queens and the punishing god themselves. In such conditions revolutions enter stage left.

François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture is the face – the hero – of this revolution; an especially affirmative image if you consider that for the French the image of the revolution has become the guillotine, its most prominent sign a beheaded king. 'The father of Haiti' is held responsible for sustaining and transforming what was one of many slave rebellions into a successful revolution against colonial terror. The French Revolution brought forth the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen', which declared all men free and equal (on paper at least). The question of slavery could not remain unaddressed and the freshly minted French Republic needed to face its meaning under pressure of the enslaved-led revolution that was underway in Haiti. What is universality when not applied universally?

When Toussaint Louverture sent a new constitution to Napoleon in 1801, the lengthy document included the following:

ARTICLE II
Of the Inhabitants
Art. 3. – There cannot exist slaves on this territory, servitude is therein forever abolished. All men are born, live and die free and French.
Art. 4. – All men, regardless of colour, are eligible to all employment.
Art. 5. – There shall exist no distinction other than those based on virtue and talent, and other superiority afforded by law in the exercise of a public
function. The law is the same for all whether in punishment or in protection.

The sovereign state of Haiti was to be called forth without the presence of general Toussaint Louverture. He died in 1803, after being arrested by the French the year before—and a year before independence. Saint-Domingue reverted back to its original indigenous name: 'land of high mountains'.

You think about this phrase; the law is the same for all whether in punishment or in protection.

You think of the revolutionary domino effect the Haitian revolution caused in the Atlantic world.

Early in the morning you attend a legal briefing. You are in a country where you cannot get deported unless you try really hard, and you do not have that commitment in you yet. However, you want to know what you are dealing with, exactly. What is this state apparatus like? The briefing looks like this: you are standing in the field behind the tents, out of earshot form the police, in a small circle you for some reason want to describe as 'informal'. You are handed a bust card. It is a small piece of paper to keep with you. The bust card is supposed to help you when you get arrested. It lists your rights, a phone number for legal help. The card reads ADVICE ON ARREST and reminds you to say 'NO COMMENT' to call questions from police during casual chats, 'booking in' and interviews. You are reminded that when asked your nationality you must give it, and giving your name, address and date of birth might speed up your release. You can refuse to give that information, but when you are not cooperating they cannot cooperate either and, for example, decline to show you to the lavatory. This is the limit of questions to be answered.

You have the right to free legal advice, to have someone informed of your arrest, an appropriate adult present if you appear under 18, and an interpreter if English is not your first language.

Being arrested at protests mean that you can afford certain things. You can afford to be arrested. You are not a nurse or care worker for whose career having a criminal record will be fatal, you need not fear the treatment you will receive during arrest or in prison, for they have proven to treat bodies like yours with civility.

There are rules to obey in order to exercise your rights in this way, our bodies fall among those rules.

You think about the many times the news has shown you what should have been an arrest and ended up being an execution.

This is meant for protesting, there are rules to obey in order to exercise your rights in this way. Where is the line drawn?

You are at a protest in Washington, DC and you have just decided that the person standing next to you is good people. They heard you complain about being hungry and asked if you wanted some of their food. You tell them the offer is very kind but you are fasting so there is no need for the food. They mention that they cannot be arrested because they are trans. They are not safe from police and putting oneself in a situation where they are allowed to directly impact your body ... it is very much ill-advised. Their aunt is up there. They are here for support but cannot get involved, it is not safe. You, too, cannot get arrested on this day – or any day in the US – because

you are foreign national, your accent honed by American TV, and therefore you cannot be arrested. They will unceremoniously deport you.

you say it is a risk you also cannot afford taking, gesturing at yourself. You look at each other knowingly. You stay with them, watching those that do get arrested.

you nod, do not offer an explanation on why you don't want to get arrested, and stay with them watching those that do.

you join the others on the steps to get arrested.

You are in the street. Properly in the street, where the cars normally drive. Left and right of you there are broad car lanes and beyond that, high-rises. American high-rises that scratch the bellies of the low-hanging clouds that over the city. One of them is a Trump hotel and people are gathering. Angry. Scared. The man is still president of the place and he just bombed the general of another country in a country they are at war with. Those present do not agree with such a policy. The traffic in the streets of downtown Chicago has come to a standstill. This has happened because you, and hundreds of protesters with you, are walking in these streets that are meant for cars. You and hundreds of others are walking in the middle of the street with banners and megaphones. You are glad the streets aren't empty; safety lies in numbers. There is one lane, the one that runs past Lake Michigan, that has stayed unobstructed. Some people call out to block it, and this is where it becomes clear the group is not of one mind. Blocking that road will lead to arrest. The person next to you is a nurse and cannot afford to get arrested – they will lose their job.

Up until then you had been walking with them, holding the other end of a large banner that spans half the street when you walk with it. You eventually decide to hold it in front and behind you, the banner snaking between you. The words NO MORE WARS written between you. Somehow this feels playful. Walking in the street feels a little bit like being in a theme park, or at the beach; beneath the street the beach after all. There is something relaxed about it, and a little bit like you're a child at

play. The rules are suspended and its remnants hover between the tall buildings like fog. The police are very calm, almost disinterested. When asked how they feel about the protest one of them replies: 'I don't have an opinion on politics. I am too busy picking up extra shifts and sleeping when I get back.' The road was never overtaken, and you don't hear of any arrests that day.

When you speak of protest, and of the US, you speak of Black Lives Matter.

When you speak of protest, and of the US, you speak of Black Lives Matter. Or rather, you speak of military-grade weapons in the hands of police.

Your own body is the first thing on your mind and you cannot deny discomfort is a prominent part of not just the protests, but the protesters as well.

When it comes to the use of police force, you know these things aren't always deserved. The physical response of the state machine uses other bodies for that response and more often than not it lies in the hands of scared white men wrapped up in uniforms – who were then handed guns. Less than, fully lethal or otherwise deemed effective. You think of the news that manages to make its way over from the US, the headlines, in contrast to those that never made your feed.

Breonna Taylor, shot – by police – while sleeping; Daunte Wright, shot – by police – as he was trying to get back in his car; Rayshard Brooks, shot – by police– as he ran from them; Daniel Prude, died of 'complications of asphyxia' as police restrained him; George Floyd, died after police knelt on his neck for over nine minutes; Atatiana Jefferson, was shot – by police – from outside as she was sitting at her kitchen table; Aura Rosser, shot – by police – in her own home as she was holding a knife (according to the official report, this was before officers were equipped with body cameras); Stephon Clark, shot – by police – as he was standing in his grandmother's yard holding a mobile phone police officers said believed to be a gun; Botham Jean, shot – by off-duty police – as he was sitting on his couch in his own home; Philando Castile, shot – by police – as he was sitting in the car with his girlfriend and her daughter; Alton Sterling, shot – by police – while he was pinned to the ground by police; Freddie Gray, died in the back of a police van 45 minutes after being arrested, reasons unclear, spine severed; Janisha Fonville, shot – by police – that was

called to take her to a mental health facility; Eric Garner, died while being kept in a choke-hold by police; Michelle Cusseaux, shot by police that were called to take her to a mental health facility, police said she charged them with a hammer; Akai Gurley, shot – by police – while walking down the stairs of his building; Gabriella Nevarez, shot – by police – as her car hit a patrol car; Tamir Rice, was shot – by police – while playing with a toy gun; Michael Brown, shot – by police – in a scuffle with police as he and his friend were stopped while they were walking in the street; Tanisha Anderson, died after being handcuffed on the ground by police that were called to take her to a mental health facility. The list is incomplete, grows every week.

You notice how many people needed help, how many were sitting in their own home, how you've heard some stories and names and others not at all.

A study assessing the risk of being killed by excessive police force in the US that was published in 2019 in PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America) by Frank Edwards, Hedwig Lee and Michael Esposito, has concluded that 'Black women and men and American Indian and Alaska Native women and men are significantly more likely than white women and men to be killed by police.' Black men in the United States top this list, as about 1 in every 1,000 Black men 'can expect to be killed by police'. It is the phrasing that gets to you: can expect to. The same way you can expect to develop allergies or grow grey hair. There is such a discrepancy between this expectation and what the French protesters in yellow vests were expecting.

Say you were there, what can you expect? For argument's sake, say you were there during a protest, rather than just existing in the street or selling cigarettes or counterfeit money or sitting in your house or something else that does not warrant death in the slightest. Say you were there at a protest, what can you expect?

Black Lives Matter.

You have every reason to expect the police would manhandle or even kill you, however superficial the reason might be.

You have no reason to expect the police would manhandle or even kill you.

Detour: you want to sit with these names and stories for a minute. You want to see their faces before you come back to this.

While you are walking you wonder what it was this time, what detail, expression, word – what spark – brought on such an en masse protest against something that has been happening for as long as anyone can remember. You have moved out of the suburbs to stay with a friend who lives downtown in the city so that you can be at all the protests. Moments need to seized, movements do not happen overnight – whatever those who do not pay attention might say – and you are committed to being here. Depending on the perspective your body gives you, you might be the odd one out for a change. You dress down appropriately in dark tones, because this is not about you, and walk around in anger, but shame and embarrassment above all. Or you feel at home in the sea of bodies, tired and energised and so very angry and done with what is happening. Whoever you are, as you are passing through the streets a Black couple to your left draws your attention and you come to a halt. The couple is facing each other, their garments flow in the wind just so that it seems to draw the universe in while they are staring at each other, smiling wide. Someone stands in front of them, declaring them married.

Black Lives Matter is not a new phrase, nor is the way people who are not Black need reminding. But more policemen showed themselves, killing someone, and the footage is everywhere. And then suddenly, you are everywhere. Sure, you in the plural but also you, small and personal. Outside when you didn't expect to be in that country you already knew didn't care. Everyone was locked up inside and there seems to be a collective decision

– more so among certain age/race demographics than others – to go outside for this, even if you are not in the US. George Floyd's name and face are everywhere and local cases of police violence and death under suspicious circumstances are brought forward. In the Netherlands: Mitch Henriquez, Salim Hadj Ali, Abid Mahyouti, Tomy Holten, to name a few.

Around a year after the Black Lives Matter protests the policeman is tried and found guilty for the murder of George Floyd. It is better than the lack of response we've seen so far, but it is drop in the ocean. We all know it, too. In the days after the verdict a report comes out. An international inquiry finds that 'police killings of Black Americans amount to crimes against humanity'. The human rights lawyers that have conducted the research state that these systematic police killings should be investigated and prosecuted under international law. Some of the team are quoted to be shocked by what they found as the work went on. Some of the things they are accused of: violating its international human rights obligations, racial profiling, tolerating the 'alarming national pattern of disproportionate use of deadly force' and the lack of legal action against police officers who kill Black Americans. You see the face of the policeman on trial come by, a snapshot as the guilty verdict is read to him. He looks thoroughly confused.

As the case of George Floyd's death is tried, more reports make it to the news. Of other Black Americans being shot in those very hours. You think back to the BLM protests, wonder if they will erupt again. You were

in the streets, protesting. You were

not, nor have you ever been, worried about violence inflicted on your body when you are acting on your right to protest.

in the streets, protesting. BLM is a call and the call went out to you.

in your own neighbourhood, you don't want to end up among the statistics.

There is a thing about words, phrasings. Some say language is meant to call things by their name, to describe, to tell of things that came to us without words. Much like the yellow vests came off lucky, for they could have been the safety vests, or perhaps just rioters, had things been different. The effect of such words isn't always straightforward. They create things, enlarge and diminish them. France knew a revolution, this we know. Haiti knew a revolution, this we know too. Then why do so many revolutions that are like the Haitian one – a slave-led revolution – called rebellions? Why is it that as soon as the word 'slave' is attached to them words like insurrection, revolt or rebellion pop up? Resistance is a kinder version, though it doesn't quite have the cachet 'revolution' has. The French Revolution gets phrases like 'Western liberal democracy' while the Haitian revolution gets 'self-liberated slaves'. A term too confusing to unpack properly. Who else was to free them, why is freeing them on the table, if we accept the principles the French Revolution claimed to purport? Is not every enslaved-led revolution, successful or not, as or more radical than those engaged with by those that were already considered humans, if not citizens? Or on a smaller scale, if you take issue with the questioning of the magnitude of the French Revolution vs the Haitian revolution – between Haiti and France, guess which 'revolution' is automatically capitalized when you type? You can check.

In the years after the French and Haitian Revolution there were many revolutionary attempts in the Caribbean. Such as the

Curaçao Slave Revolt, Fédon's Revolution (also known as Brigands' War, or Fédon's rebellion) in Grenada, the Second Maroon War in Jamaica, the Demerara rebellion, Saint-Domingue slave revolt (even before the successful one that established Haiti), the revolution in Saint Lucia, or Guadalupe – the list goes on. Such challenges to power have always been there on colonized land, mind. These hardly make it into the European retelling of history of which they are so much part of. Some of the revolutionary principles did travel and extended beyond France's borders – mainly because Haiti showed the French that it had to – and France abolished slavery in their colonies for a short while. Some planters were even beheaded. But the scale of the planet then, the time it took to travel somewhere, it meant that the news never arrived in some places, didn't change lives, before Napoleon came along and reinstated slavery.

You'd pick any of the options, if you had to choose. The name is unimportant to your resistance.

If you had to choose, you wouldn't pick revolution or revolt. They are much too visible forms of resistance.

The panic is unexpected when it hits you, when you manage to identify it. Everyone you are protesting with means well. They are the ones that are putting their bodies out there for injustices that are being perpetrated on other bodies. All their bodies, with a few exceptions, are those of white pensioners. You know full well that some are not pensioners because they have lived their lives in service of this activism, that there are no pensions to fall back on. The space where you are all crowded together for that week feels unsafe nonetheless. Racism is real and it is played out over your body in the space without the well-intending ones even noticing. That is the problem, they do not notice you, do not see you sometimes. One day after breaking fast you put a bagel in a toaster, stand next to it while talking to someone, and when you turn around the bagel is gone. Someone took it, as if served to them. As if everything must be for them, without question. Another day you are waiting in line in the bathroom. You all joke together and when the stall in front of you opens up the person behind you unceremoniously steps past you and into the stall, closing the door. You struggle, later, to explain how this is racism, how it made you feel so small you have become invisible even as you were right there, speaking.

So yes, the panic attacks at the end of the week are unexpected, in a way. Because you know such panic shouldn't be there, among these people, they are not police. And yet.

Everything happens in the most orderly fashion. There are several celebrities at this protest and you have never seen someone whose face you know that well without knowing them before. You are introduced to one of them, they are kind, quick with their words, a professional when faced with attention, not just a camera. They are here to spread awareness; messy and bloody protests are not part of that. There are politicians and other speakers calling into a microphone in the cold.

First, everyone is asked to move off of the monumental building's steps, as it is illegal to stand on them – or so they tell you. Second, everyone that is not on the steps is herded back. Further and further back until the people you know are small in the distance. Third, they ask everyone to leave the steps a number of times, giving warning, before the police start to arrest everyone on the steps. The arrests are made per row, it takes a long time. It's a calm business. When you get arrested you are walked inside. They give you your arrest slip after a few hours and you are told to come back the next day and pay your $50 fine or set a court date.

You walk outside, unscathed.

You are at a protest. It is a protest for a thing you care about. Care about deeply. You are not white and the police are close by, protecting whatever it is you are protesting against, in one way or another. You are at this protest and you survey the field, so to say. Are people you care about are getting arrested? Have you come alone? You are here, that is your stand. You will absolutely not go up there to get arrested, your fear of getting lynched runs deep. You say to the sides, look around but keep your eyes lowered.

You go home unscathed.

It is an arrest that is too messy to describe. You are in the street, there is protesting going on and there are so many of you. It feels safer – not to be confused with safe – and angry, and right, and about bloody time. It is then that police decide to intervene. Nothing is happening, really. You all are there, walking, in the street, but this is a given during protests in most countries. It is that specific moment in time when an orange man is president and Black Lives Matter protesters are plucked from the streets and shoved in vans. As they read you nothing, do not tell you what they are doing or why, you cannot say you have been arrested. But plucked from the street and tossed in an unmarked van you are.

Who is to say if you come back unscathed?

You are walking. Walking in the street near your house, just in the neighbourhood. You lift your phone to your face. You are shot in the back.

To be so fearsome.