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## Exploring the Psychological Realities of U.S Women Soldiers during the Iraq War in Sand Queen Novel

### A B S T R A C T

Women have recently begun to work in places of conflict and war. They play an effective role that is often ignored. She performs various tasks as a journalist, paramedic, nurse, soldier, and other similar responsibilities that represent the element of peace in war. This led to many serious problems and violations, such as rape, crimes of all kinds, kidnapping, and gender-based violence. Since her inception, women have been accustomed to taking care of the family and children and engaging in a constant clash with the tyrannical masculine structure of men. However, when examining different periods of history, we find that women have prominent characteristics in wars and have held many positions in the military field. This was met with societal rejection of the idea of women's presence on battlefields side by side with men. But over time, there has become more awareness of the importance of women in maintaining peace among people, as they are distinguished by multiple skills. Governments began issuing laws that allowed women to join the military without restriction or embarrassment. American female soldiers played a prominent role in participating in the Iraq War in 2003, ignoring the idea of possible violence against women. The study revealed several aspects of violence against American female soldiers in Iraq. Helen Benedict's novel *The Sand Queen* (2011) will establish a literary foundation for analysis by applying gender-based violence model. The results showed that violence against women in war is undoubtedly deadly and has far-reaching effects on people, societies, and civilizations. Policymakers and military organizations can design effective policies to protect the safety and well-being of women in military forces by studying the dynamics of violence against women on battlefields.

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## الكشف عن الحقائق النفسية للمجنذات الأمريكيات خلال حرب العراق في رواية ملكة الرمال

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## الملخص

أصبحت النساء في الآونة الأخيرة تعمل في أماكن النزاع والحروب فهن يقمن بدور فعال ويتم تجاهله في كثير من الأحيان. إذ تقوم بمهام متنوعة فهي صحفية، مسعفة، ممرضة وجندي وإلى ما شابه ذلك من المسؤوليات التي تمثل عنصر السلام في الحرب. إن هذا الدور أدى إلى حدوث كثير من المشاكل الجسيمة والانتهاكات كالاغتصاب، والجرائم بشتى أشكالها والاختطاف والعنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي. اعتادت المرأة منذ نشأتها على رعاية العائلة والأطفال والخوض في صدام مستمر مع تركيبة الرجل الذكورية المستبدة ومع هذا فعند البحث في فترات مختلفة من التاريخ نجد أن المرأة لها سمة بارزة في الحروب وشغلت العديد من الوظائف في المجال العسكري وهذا ما قوبل بالرفض المجتمعي لفكرة تواجد المرأة في ساحات القتال جنبا إلى جنب مع الذكور. لكن مع تقدم الزمن، أصبح هناك وعي أكثر لأهمية المرأة في حفظ السلام بين الشعوب؛ كونها تتميز بمهارات متعددة حيث بدأت الحكومات بإصدار قوانين تسمح بانضمام النساء للسلك العسكري دون قيد أو حرج؛ لذلك لعبت المجنذات الأمريكيات دوراً بارزاً بمشاركة في حرب العراق عام ٢٠٠٣ متجاهلات فكرة العنف المحتمل ضد النساء. تناولت هذه الدراسة الكشف عن عدة أوجه للعنف ضد المجنذات الأمريكيات في العراق. ستضع رواية ملكة الرمال (٢٠١١) للكاتبة هيلين بنديكت أساساً أدبيًا للتحليل عن طريق تطبيق نموذج العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي. وأظهرت النتائج أن العنف ضد المرأة في الحرب مميت بلا شك وله آثار بعيدة المدى على الناس والمجتمعات والحضارات. فيما يمكن لواقعي السياسات والمنظمات العسكرية تصميم سياسات فعالة لحماية سلامة ورفاهية القوات العسكرية من النساء من خلال دراسة ديناميكيات العنف ضد المرأة في ساحات القتال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجنس ، الحرب ، الصدمة ، علم النفس ، العنف ، المرأة

## 1. Introduction

In his article "The Literature of Conflict", Woodward (2005) stated that as long as there has been war, writers have long sought to understand the nature of war, converting battlefield atrocities into stories and attempting to salvage anything meaningful from its wreckage. According to this, a war novel can be defined as a type of fiction that depicts any form of fighting within a specific period; it is also called "Military Fiction". (Contributors to Wikimedia projects, 2018).

With works like *The Iliad & The Odyssey* (6th century BC), and *Beowulf* (1815) being set in battle and originally written to preserve the histories or mythologies of the culture while also making it accessible to others, the first war novels were typically in the epic poetry and sagas of the classical and medieval era. These texts were originally written to make the culture accessible to others while also preserving its histories or mythologies. The tragedies and histories of dramatists were also early sources of inspiration for the war book. Shakespeare's *Henry V* established a new idea which is telling historical and fictional stories. In addition to that, other works have been done that introduced the war literature from the view of authors; *The Book of Revelations* (AD 95), Dante's *Inferno* (1472) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Various works support the anti-war movement such as *Le Feu* (1916)

written by Henri Barbusse. The development of war literature began in the 1920s after World War I with several subjects that are based on heroism and the conflict in war zones. Furthermore, there are two directions of novels; first, to explore the realities of war for instance *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928) by Erich Maria Remarque and *Bird Song* (1993) by Sebastian Faulks. Their subjects focused on how people and societies experienced war trauma. War has influenced some of the most well-known works in the American canon such as Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990) and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), which dramatizes (if not romanticizes) the author's young experience during World War I. Numerous post-war books were inspired by the Holocaust, a tragic historical event that continues to be a recurring topic in writing today. War writings have also been inspired by other wars, including the Cold War, the Iran-Iraq War, the Palestine War, and the War on Terror after September 11, 2001. Today, some people who are in conflict areas publish their stories through blogs and publications. Colby Buzzell's well-known blog *My War* which details his time as a soldier in Iraq, is an example of this followed by many novels that tackle the war in Iraq in 2003 such as *The Yellow Birds* (2012) by Kevin Powers and *Fobbit* (2012) by David Abrams. (Isabella, 2020)

Female soldiers appeared to be active in several military regions in the world as presented by Campbell (1993). This study exemplified the experience of female soldiers during WWII in different countries (U.S., U.K., Germany, and Soviet Union) and showed that women's roles in combat are crucial it broke the stereotype of limited status of female soldiers presenting honorable lessons for resilience and courage.

Cooper (2000) contends in *Battlefield: Gender, War, and Narrative in the Twentieth Century* that although discussions of women's resistance and involvement in war have been present in literature for some time, the gendered perspective on war has not entirely integrated it into canonical works of literature. It emphasizes that women's involvement in war is more complex and widespread than this internalization may imply, acknowledging and challenging the standard war narrative that splits women between those who support peace and those that support war based on cultural norms.

Ogugua (2006) produced another study that explored how female soldiers deal with the pain and memories of Nigeria's civil war by analyzing Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It delved into their war experiences and aftermath, concentrating on the psychological and emotional issues they endured. The analysis in the study focused on the psychological, emotional, and physical wounds that trauma leaves behind, how memory works with inconsistent stories and faulty memories, and how storytelling might help with trauma processing and healing. Additionally, it discusses how Adichie uses gender to depict war trauma and her literary devices in doing so.

Within "The Feminization of Warfare; in the Case of Sebastian Faulks' Ghost", Sarah Cole explores Faulks' work as an angle to study the War on Terror's influence on gender roles, psychological settings, portrayals of the "Other", and even literary techniques themselves. She digs into Faulks' depiction of the "feminization" of war, presumably investigating how traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity are questioned or strengthened in this multifaceted struggle (Cole, 2007).

Examining how modern literature depicts female soldiers injured in conflict zones is explained in Sanfilippo's (2017) research "Combat Prosthetics: Reclaiming the Literature of the Wounded Female Soldier in the War on Terror". The results underscore the significance of this literature in highlighting the critical examination of conventional storytelling.

Brown (2021) Analyzed women soldiers who served in Military forces during WWI by applying the gender theory to selected fictional texts such as Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War (1930)* and Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone (1929)*, and some propaganda posters. The results showed that war affects the women perceptions towards the issue of gender since what they experienced during the compact affect badly their aftermath attitude towards relationships and motherhood.

War poets and novelists have been writing about war for years, and they continue to do so now because it is such a terrible and significant occurrence that is a persistent fixture in modern civilization. It's crucial to highlight that throughout the years, there has been a shift in the focus of study from an almost exclusive concentration on white male troops to the studies of trauma and female views. The history of women serving in the military services alongside their male counterparts is one of persistence, bravery, and success stories. Despite significant changes in military opportunities and responsibilities, women often face challenges such as participation, prejudice, and resistance. This history is distinguished by progressive reforms that have resulted in greater gender equality throughout the military's ranks.

Furthermore, several communities serve the issue of women from military duty following World War II. However, as tensions associated with the Cold War ascended, so did the demand for military personnel, and women's presence in different military jobs became a better option. As a result, several military services established separate women's sections or units. More and more nations started allowing women to serve in combat-related positions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, complete gender integration in battle tasks was frequently received with opposition which called for time for realization. In 2013, the United States formally repealed the restriction on women participating in combat positions, acknowledging their contributions and talents in an extensive choice of military careers. Many nations have recently increased the options available to women in the military, notably in submarines, special operations teams, and other formerly unrestricted positions. Women have thrived in these professions, demonstrating their ability and commitment to work (Woods, 2022). Yet, Acker (1990, p.139) pointed out that by restricting or separating women from men, large institutions like armies or industries have historically regulated sexuality. Due to this, organizations' attempts to regulate sexuality privatized or pathologized women's sexuality while quietly normalizing some norms of masculinity in public.

The stereotype of women is to be in non-combat positions, the question is why do women join the military? A study conducted by Torrealba (2020) investigated the motivation of females to join the army. She addressed that "Gender" plays a vital role behind the female motivations which is inherently associated with their ideologies towards the cultural stereotype". Reis and Menezes (2019, p. 1005) announced as of February 2012, over 20,000 female military personnel had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Women have also been recognized for their courageous actions. The military service provided multiple reasons for

people to join, such as bonuses, complete reimbursement for expenses, capacities that would open the door to professional employment choices post-military life, and chances to travel and experience intriguing journeys. However, some individuals were inspired to enlist because of their patriotism. In contrast, others did so because they had family members in the military or were looking forward to potential retirement benefits. (Torrealba 2020)

Regrettably, there have been incidences of physical abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual assault against women in the military. These types of violence are alarming and harm the health and careers of female soldiers. The culture code of silence, gender disparities, and hierarchical structures have occasionally led to an atmosphere where violence against women could exist.

According to the statistics presented by the Department of Defense, in 2011, the US military recorded 3,158 incidences of sexual assault. While sexual assaults are typically underreported, the situation has been exacerbated in the military. less than 14% of survivors reveal their violent experiences, and over 19,000 assaults against women were committed in the military in 2010 alone. (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). L. Stalsburg (2011) disclosed, according to some data, those who have had treatment for rape, sexual assault, or sexual harassment in military medical facilities may experience a “second victimization” since they frequently exhibit higher rates of depression and Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Combat, sexual assault, and family separation were all stressful military experiences. Women’s capacities to identify and deal with stressors varied, and they used a range of cognitive and behavioral coping mechanisms to reduce their stress. According to recent research, more than 15% of female soldiers returning from Iraq and 11% from Afghanistan fulfilled the diagnosis criteria for severe depression, anxiety, mental health problems, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. (Hoge et al.,2004)

Mulhall (2009) in his paper presented that as a result of women’s encounters with adverse conditions such as combat-related violence, sexual trauma, and other threats thousands of women have suffered terrible injuries, and it is unknown how many of them have severe mental health issues. The Department of Veterans Affairs adopts its term “military sexual trauma” (MST) to refer to sexual assault or recurrent, threatening sexual harassment that happened while the veteran was in the service. According to recent data from OEF/OIF veterans, 15.1% of women and 0.7% of males experienced military sexual trauma. (Kimerling et al., 2010)

Violence against women, with a focus on gender-based violence, is pervasive, particularly in times of conflict, and can affect both civilian and military women. The image of gender-based violence against women in war zones has been questioned by Rich et al. (2012, p. 272) who stated that feminist organizational researchers have specifically questioned how organizations provide an illusion of gender neutrality while concurrently favoring masculinized identities and values over femininity. These studies have shed light on how gender interacts with organizational structures, labor processes, and power dynamics to favor masculinities over femininities. This work investigated how hegemonic structures of masculinity and gender-based policies jeopardize women in military organizations.

Studies of sexual harassment, or sets of sexualized, discriminating, and unwanted communicative interactions as the one carried out by (Clair, 1994) functions as a “discourse political weapon of oppression”, since the investigation of sexual harassment in the military, especially the armed forces of European nations, can reveal light on the prevalence of corruption or wrongdoing that may taint the reputation of these organizations. When cases of sexual harassment and misbehavior in the military are thoroughly examined and documented, it frequently reveals deeply established issues that put into question the image of these institutions as bastions of discipline and ethical behavior. Sexual harassment generally entails the abuse of power and authority, and when such violations are exposed, they show an unsettling truth: that people in positions of authority may be exploiting their status for personal benefit or domination. Meanwhile, the threat is one of the most important subjects that are focused on the subjects of the military’s dedication to justice and their reputations because of misbehavior. However, finding jobs is not easy as it may have further problems such as the European military. In addition to that, being one of the military members may affect the psychological and social life. In addition to protecting the military’s honor and prestige, addressing these challenges is essential for defending the larger ideals and values that these European nations espouse. The investigation of sexual harassment is a chance for openness, change, and, eventually, an enhanced image that represents a dedication to the highest standards of conduct and ethics, even when it may expose instances of corruption or offenses. (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012)

According to Collinson and Collinson (1989), organizations frequently disregard, tolerate, or embrace conventional male sexuality, giving it an elevated stature. Men may utilize their sexuality as a tool to uphold their masculinity, forge homosocial relationships, and demonstrate their supremacy over women. To be sure, the US military is not a typical institution, but rather an entire institution that grows in practically every aspect of its soldiers’ life (Goffman, 1961). Although there are significant differences between the military and other organizations in terms of gender and sexuality, there are also similarities. The military maintains a sense of gender neutrality, masculine identities, and images are the unspoken but pervasive norm, and heterosexuality has been fully naturalized.

Berdak (2013, pp. 18–19) stated violating women is a certain issue that should have laws and punishments. However, gender has a great value in society. Besides, the role of women in wars is important as they provide aid as well as have more experience in the economic field. In addition to that, the women’s positions are dedicated to finding a solution to the issue of violence against women. The first campaign emerged in the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when women focused on their rights. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Ida B. Wells disseminate awareness about domestic violence, sexual assault, and other types of abuse. Ida B. Wells, for example, was a notable figure who raised awareness of sexual abuse against Black women in the United States. These pioneering feminists fought to alter cultural norms, overturn laws that frequently fail to safeguard women and increase public awareness of the problem of violence against women. Their initiatives paved the way for later feminist movements as well as a more extensive effort to eliminate prejudice and violence against women.

## 2. Gender-based violence and trauma theory

Judith Herman's iconic book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992) provides an in-depth discussion of trauma theory, yet, she does not expressly present a single definition. Rather, her book is a comprehensive and groundbreaking display of trauma theory, unquestionably serving as a comprehensive framework that has a significant impact on the development of trauma studies and trauma-informed care. Herman's primary interest is in comprehending the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma, particularly in the setting of survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence. She highlights the nature of trauma as an occurrence that substantially shatters a person's sense of safety and self, affecting that person's capacity to overcome it. Herman has discussed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the use of certain strategies such as amnesia and dissociation, and means of surviving. She demonstrated the social and cultural factors of trauma.

In addition to that, Freud has been named the "Father of Psychoanalysis" and has established a method that deals with traumatic experiences of human psychology. Bessel van der Kolk is known in trauma research His book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014) has been regarded as a landmark work. Meanwhile, Robert Jay Lifton's study of the psychological ramifications of war, as well as his exploration of "psychological numbness" and the perspective of survivors, have greatly improved our understanding of trauma in the context of war and conflict.

Charlotte Bunch is the first who state and address the term "gender-based violence". Bunch played a role in the issue of violence against women in the 1970s. As it represents a main issue that should have support and freedom. This involves legal reforms, survivor support services, education and awareness initiatives, and an emphasis on transforming cultural norms to prevent violence and preserve women's and girls' rights and dignity. She actively promoted the word, which has subsequently become extensively used in academic, activist, and policy contexts to characterize violence directed predominantly against women. (Bunch & Carrillo, 1992)

Bunch co-founded and served as Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) for many years. She works with CWGL to raise awareness about gender-based violence, espouse policy reforms, and promote women's rights groups throughout the world. While Charlotte Bunch has frequently been credited with popularizing the phrase "gender-based violence", the collaborative work of numerous activists and researchers throughout the world has led to a better understanding, awareness, and reaction to gender-based violence as a crucial issue. Psychological trauma is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as the direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or potential threats to one's life or physical well-being, as well as witnessing an event that brings harm to others, as well as learning about sudden and violent death, severe injury, or threats to one's life. (Guze, 1995)

Studies from 2000 to 2018 revealed that more than one in four women (27%) between the ages of 15 and 44 suffered from GBV. Additionally, Ostadtaghizadeh et al. (2023, p. 2) explained that Gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women have been defined

internationally since the early 1990s by the United Nations (UN) within the concept of the Declaration of Violence Against Women. It is a phenomenon profoundly rooted in gender inequality that continues to be one of the most noteworthy human rights abuses in all nations. GBV, as the most predominant kind of violence against women, embraces any physical, sexual, psychological, economic, or other suffering of women in the form of limiting their freedom in personal or social life. Domestic violence, physical assault, compelled marriage, female genital mutilation, and harassment, constitute the majority of sexual violence in interpersonal relationships

### 3. Methodology

This study was conducted to investigate the experiences of female characters based on gender violence by using critical literary analysis. The sample is Helen Benedict's 2011 novel *The Sand Queen* which will be analyzed to examine the female soldiers' psychological effects of gender-based violence and investigate how the female character in *The Sand Queen* navigate the post-trauma experiences. The GBV Model is used to distinguish the relationship between ordinary military pressures and the special psychological trauma on female soldiers.

### 4. Discussion

Helen Benedict, a writer and professor at Columbia University, is best recognized for her writings on social injustice and the Iraq War. Benedict's works look at conflict, trauma, displacement, isolation, racism, and sexism through the viewpoint of those who are outside of cultural norms. *Sand Queen* shares the experience of an American female soldier and the disruption of an Iraqi woman student's life as a result of the American army's invasions. Benedict's nonfiction work inspired her novel *Sand Queen*. In truth, the story was inspired by Benedict's numerous conversations with female soldiers in the Iraq War, the majority of whom served at Camp Bucca at Al-Basra, Iraq. The place is featured as the setting in *Sand Queen*, Camp Bucca, described by Kate McLoughlin (2014, p.84) as "conceived of as space[s] of isolation and exceptional cognitions". These particular regions are portrayed as disturbing factors where females need to make decisions about how to deal with forces such as denial, anxiety, and stress. Each moment Kate and Naema, the main protagonists in Benedict's story, strive to avoid or exorcise these entities. They have been driven by the animosity of the battle zone.

Therefore, Benedict did not decide to stand up for female soldiers and reclaim their lost history from the mists of public conversation until she became aware of their silence in American culture. Benedict subsequently remarked that she "was listening to all sorts of female soldiers from all over the country who wanted to tell their stories" (Benedict, 2009, p. 2). In her interview for *The Lonely Soldier*, Helen Benedict discussed Mickiela Montoya's response, saying, "I don't even tell people about seeing death and being shot at anymore because they don't believe me. They assume all I did was office work" (Benedict, 2009, p.198). The scene amid the *Sand Queen* provides such an opening by highlighting the disastrous repercussions of war in Iraq especially after the events of September 11. The location of war serves as an assembly point for major characters, each of whom stands for a unique aspect of this tragic event. Benedict emphasizes that in addition to physical issues,

female soldiers who survived rape or sexual abuse experienced long-lasting psychological harm. They strained against symptoms of emotional numbness, despondency, scary memories, and nightmares. The location of battle trauma and its aftereffects in Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen* provide a clue as to the elements of the traumatic event. These elements are wrapped within a dialogical narrative that chronicles the painful experiences of persons from two different backgrounds, Iraq and America. American female veteran Kate Brady views her suffering through the frame of Iraq's harsh terrain and the horrific realities of war duties. The traumatic milieu exacerbates Kate's awareness of the disparity between her military and civilian identity.

According to Van der Hart, who claims that "when we are traumatized, we have different selves—each with its voice—made a lot of sense" (Caruth, 2014, p.180). In reality, the novel depicts three different versions of Kate: the civilian student, pre-war; the female veteran of war, and the soldier post-traumatic (PTSD) following a war. There is a significant gap between Kate's initial and final versions caused by the devastation caused by the battle, both mentally and physically. Kate visualizes the acts of brutality around her and concentrates on the horrific features of this location including her outraged reactions to the stifling environment created by the explosion's aftermath blood odor. She explains her situation full of blood and how she becomes completely unaware of her body, identity, and sense of time. Yet, vicious sights, decaying corpses, crushed bodies, toxic air, and her own experiences that link directly to the Iraqi conflict zone have a significant influence on the development of her panic attacks and distorted consciousness. The way from Basrah to Baquba was similar to the horror scenes from the movie "Corpses lying in the streets smashed and gory, like those rundown deer on the highways at home, only with human faces"(13) . Yet, there was still a spark of hope amid all this destruction when she could not restrain her femininity to hold back when she was always empathetic with Iraqi children and tried to offer them some water. However, male soldiers persisted in approving their savagery when their commander said that soldiers should not empathize with kids as they might be "tiny suicide" .The novel incarnates several environmental conditions through the story's recurrent spotlight on the causes of violence generated by the physical surroundings (McLoughlin,2014, p.85). The arid "suffocating desert" (116) that encircles Camp Bucca. Beetles, spiders, snakes, and scorpions are shown as traumatizing incitement, which Kate has to cope with. Kate notes that such deadly insects force her to "jump or squeal" (102); nevertheless, she has to utilize her strength in an attempt to appear unshaken.

In her article "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory", Michelle Balaev discusses the effect of location and its impact on trauma as well as how trauma novels define the excruciating experience. (Balaev, 2008, p.149). Desert becomes the main resource of all of Kate's psychological complexities and trauma; she continuedly to grumble from the Camp and described wit with such unlikable expression "God, what I would give for a breath of clean air, one that isn't filled with dust and the stink of burning shit and diesel. Air like the air at home: clean, cool, mountain air" (13). Depicting the conflict zone and the arid summer days at Camp Bucca stands in stark contrast to Kate's longing for the verdant American meadows. This is what Balaev (2012, p39) proved that the location of discomfort gains a distinct identity as a means for conveying the particularity of emotional and bodily reactions.

It might be true to say that the desert is the male and Kate is the female who can't stand with her masculinist counterpart. Men are linked with aggression, strength, and violence, whereas women are connected with passivity, frailty, and nurture. The harsh climate and merciless environment of the desert might be interpreted as a metaphor for masculine identity. Only the strong make it out of this realm, and violence is sometimes required to do so. Women soldiers, on the other hand, defy gender stereotypes by stepping into a male-dominated sector and proving their power, courage, and perseverance. In his discussion of the significance of location in traumatic situations, Balaev (2012, p.22) discovers the interactive connection between memory and place. Using the word "warehouse", he illustrates how memory interacts fluidly with the location to "showcase the ways traumatic perceptions are restructured as a result of painful experience. The metaphor of memory as a warehouse is echoed by Kate's conscious numerous terrible moments that go beyond Camp Bucca's oppressive natural setting, other people, and "dusty, unshaved, slumped" (152) and "bombers" (27).

By delving into Kates and other characters' horrific experiences, Benedict demonstrates the entire scope of how the battle zone is the "wanton destruction of war" (117), "Everything about this war conspires to make us helpless" (118). Kate like any other female soldier shares the same traumatic experience of war in which there is not war take place in quite places, rather it is all in conflict regions (desert, sea, mountains ... etc.) where all the ecological footprints exposing their fangs and harshness to any non-human mission. In simple words, it is just as Kate explained "disgusting" (51), "the flattest damn place on the planet" (85), "a hell on earth" (143), and "the land of fucking dead" (176).

The novel begins with Kate describing "The biggest frigging spider" (Benedict, 2011, p.11) that she had ever seen. Despite killing the spider and placing it over her bed to alert the thirty-three male veterans who snore loudly and with whom she shares the room, she cannot ignore another form of gothic fear symbolized by the wind. These environmental phenomena such as wind, dryness, sun, and insects are all shapes of refusal to the existence of a female to be a soldier in a desert. The masculine military institutional norms represented by male veterans allied with the natural forces to decline appropriate female participation in the war. Kate was marginalized during her employment as a guard at the Bucca prison entrance, the biggest jail in Iraq. She was working in a position where she interacted with local citizens and the danger was at its maximum levels, this is against the military laws because the jail is located on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border in the south of the Kuwaiti border, in the most impoverished and desolate region of the desert, the soldier must be accompanied by a fellow for safety and monitoring. On the jail's western side, Kate was employed as a guard in a prison tower. In an interview with Capt. Margret, who served in the Iraq war in 2003, admitted that females are not allowed to serve on the frontlines but they sit side by side with men breaking the old conceptions that women cannot do anything (U.S.: Women at Arms: Beyond the Wire, the New York Times, 2009). The tower was as tall as a street lamp, and it was little more than a platform atop a scaffold constructed of unstable wood chips, with a flat canopy no bigger than a beach umbrella. That was a place where males belonged more than women. The difficulties that women have in environments where males predominate are brought to light by Kate's experience in the tower area. Even though she is a fearless and

stalwart guard, she is assaulted. Kate therefore suffered from many forms of marginalization and humiliation as a result of this location since prisoners saw it as a place that marginalized men. Because she was a young lady enforcing the law and power, prisoners used to hurl snakes at her, both living and dead. Once, they even threw excrement at her (102).

Staff Sergeant Kormick, Kate's squad leader, believes that seeing a female soldier will lessen the bloodshed of war, so he assigns Kate to act as a liaison with the local Iraqi residents. She is skeptical, though, her reluctance hints at her intention to challenge gender preconceptions and redefine gender roles and identities. According to Kate, Kormick "always gives me the job of talking to these people. He's got the idea that the sight of a female soldier will win hearts and minds [though] we have just pulverized their towns" (13). Western women are typically objectified by Arab males as physical objects and are seen as promiscuous "whores". Male soldiers contend that the US military depends on women to give companionship and sex services to male soldiers, who are the ones doing the most severe fighting in the conflict. The refusal of the female gender is not only met by her male colleagues but also by the Iraqi male prisoners who proved at most the same reactions of declining a woman to be in the military and exercising control over them as well as by even the Iraqi female civilians who astonished to see women in the shape of male appearance, this was not surprising for Kate since she already expected that from the western mentality and if it is doing so, the only excuse comes to their mind as Kate said "like I'm some clown the U.S. military shipped out for their entertainment" (15). It appears that the masculinity mentality is the same wherever the man originates. While the prisoners' psychological violence is manifested in the act of throwing feces at Kate and masturbating in front of her, physical violence is manifested in "a hail of stones" that the prisoners fling at her; "They gesture at me over and over to take off my helmet and show them my hair. And then one guy swaggers up, pulls out his dick and jerks off right in front of me" (82).

Kate reveals that the "respect" (37) she seeks in the military is transformed into sexual abuse and humiliation at the hands of peers who regard any female veteran as nothing more than an object of sexuality. This is supported by her description of how the commander looks at her body with an eye on her chest. She emphasizes that these types of behaviors are common "This is a popular theme among the guys in my platoon—me having big boobs" (28). She recognizes that being referred to as "Sand Queen" is the worst moniker a female army veteran can have, "It means an ugly-ass chick who's being treated like a queen by the hundreds of horny guys around her because there's such a shortage of females"; within the purview of this title she is "like a whore at a frat party...she's nothing but a mattress"(88). As such, Kate's title "Sand Queen" is akin to the dehumanization and rejection that female soldiers experience in this work. In an interview with Benedict, she provides the following explanation for this: "It's a derogatory term that's specific to the Iraq War, which comes mainly out of the army. It means an unattractive woman who is the object of a lot of attention from men because women are so scarce [...] As one soldier said "She's a mattress". The language they used about women is so impolite and it summarizes the denigrating attitude that so many military men have towards military women (Secrecy and Sexual Assault in the Military, 2012)

Kate echoes Benedict's description of "horrific language", stating that troops used to refer to their bathroom as "whore's baths" (51) rather than just bathrooms. According to Kate, their restrooms are like this: "There aren't any bathrooms to wash in, either. For showers, we dump bottles of water over ourselves [...] or once in a while hang up a poncho and get under a portable shower bag" (114). While peeing in the arid desert for bodily needs, she was observed by male troops who nicknamed her "Pinkass" (41,42,47,61,67,178). Kate lived with her suffering even with the lowest quality type of food that was even not suitable for the animal. Furthermore, as Kate mentioned that females are allowed to walk alone at night without a accompany for not being raped (49). How could a prestigious military U.S. institution, the strongest country in the world and richest in resources, not ensure a good standard of living and safety for her soldiers? It might be that The U.S. military, like many other organizations, has been influenced by issues of violence against women and blunders that demand urgent reform measures.

Rape and sexual harassment are two of the most severe occurrences in Kate's traumatized discourse as she mentioned that "I was fresh meat to hungry men". She describes the two soldiers attempting sexual harassment towards Kate and how another female veteran gets raped. Third Eye [another female soldier] shared her experience while Kate sought to file an official complaint of her sexual assault, the sergeant [Henley] made fun of their issue with a tone of sarcasm saying "What kind of complaint? Someone filched your nail polish?" (123) as if they have no serious problem except the trivial matter. Kate was afraid that reporting her assailants would put her life in jeopardy by shifting her from Camp Bucca into truck convoys that are often bombarded. Despite Jimmy's final rescue of Kate from her superior's grasp, Kate faced a moral conundrum because The Third Eye, her female companion, was sexually assaulted by Kormick and Boner. Kate has two options when it comes to this moral dilemma: report the incident or pretend nothing occurred. Third Eye cannot challenge the masculine culture's dominance in her unit—a reality that pushed her towards post-traumatic stress disorder and, eventually, suicide. First of all, it would undoubtedly be challenging if Kate decided to report. Kate struggled to convince herself to report. She believed that asking other male troops for assistance was a show of weakness in the first place. Evidence, such as that given by male soldiers like Jimmy, who saved Kate, was often necessary to report a crime. She had originally wanted to show that female soldiers could be just as powerful and capable of self-defense as their male counterparts. As a female soldier, Kate also found it challenging to avoid facing more discrimination if she decided to report a crime. This is a result of the pervasive prejudice that military officials held against female soldiers. For instance, Kormick thought Kate was "powdering her nose" when he saw that she was moving slowly (12).

The female leader (EOO) would have to assume Kate was preoccupied with trivial matters if she had gone to report. The leader ultimately proved to be correct in this assessment. Sergeant First Class Henley believed it was "internal strife" when Kate reported it to him (125). Additionally, he believed that Kate was attempting to undermine the "cohesion of our unit" And last but not least, she never had the guts to defend her rights because she was verbally attacked by male troops in the army. Even though reporting has its disadvantages, Kate felt compelled to do so since failing to do so might put other female

soldiers in danger. Consequently, Kate found herself in a moral bind. Kate finally decided to report the crime after considerable inner deliberation. But her conscience was troubled by the fallout from her choice. Yvette, her female companion who had helped her through her reporting process, was given a very risky convoy operation. After Yvette was murdered in the convoy, Kate felt a great deal of remorse. In the end, Kate's initial goal of defending female troops led to the murder of an innocent lady. What a mockery, a female is frightened to assist another girl in the army because of men? Therefore, EOO's solution for Kate's situation is to "Punish" by sending her to another city "Baquba" alleging that they promoted her to a higher position, while they sent her to the most suicidal task to get rid of her.

Third Eye draws attention to the prevalent norms and prejudices against women within the framework of wartime accounts. She claims that there are two prominent stereotypes that women are frequently required to represent in this setting: the forceful and aggressive "bitch" (22,36,50,184,237...), or the promiscuous "slut" (50). Third Eye notes that by declining to play any of these roles, Kate defies these assumptions. She notes that Kate puts on a "sunny little Christian act"(50), a sign that she upholds her morals and refrains from acting aggressively or promiscuously, which is what other women in their platoon are supposed to do. Kate's nonconformity makes her a desirable target for the males in her immediate vicinity. Third Eye says that because Kate defies expectations and prejudices, guys are drawn to her. Third Eye also points out that the guys become frustrated because Kate doesn't pursue sexual connections, suggesting that their expectations have not been met and that they are either dissatisfied or furious.

The Third Eye is portrayed as a lesbian who regrettably encounters a horrible sexual assault. Her sexual assault by Kormick and Boner has a severe impact on her. Third Eye swallows and looks away, displaying her emotional condition before disclosing the upsetting reality. She confesses in a raspy murmur, "He sexually assaulted me. Both him and Boner together. Of course, I'm not all right" (115). Within the context of gender dynamics and power disparities, this case of sexual harassment and assault may be examined. Notwithstanding the actual genders of those engaged, it is critical to acknowledge that rape and sexual harassment are fundamentally gendered acts of violence intended to establish masculine authority and subjugate the victim. A pattern of dominance and control is maintained by the abusive activities, which have the goal of feminizing the victim.

With "a scary numbness"(146) on her face and blood on her cheek, Kate acts unconsciously aggressively and shoots at prisoners because they undervalue her ability to use her weapon. Her deformed identity is strengthened by this specific response. Although she shoots, she also doesn't see a "dead body" or a "pool of blood" or "a body on [her] conscience"(147). According to trauma theory, Kate suffers a serious psychological violation and her traumatized reaction manifests as chronic suppressed anger. Her wrath is let loose with aggression because she lacks the skill of stress control. Kate's hostility manifests itself once more as she is allowed to beat one of the prisoners. She strikes the back of his head with her boot. The prisoner scratches his face so deeply into the desert that "the sand and blood clog [his mouth]" (154). When Kate finds out that the prisoner, she hits is Naema's father, Halim al-Jubur, she realizes that her vindictive reaction to the way her anger was expressed did not make her feel satisfied but rather catalyzed her emotions of guilt since she promised

Naema to find her father. She is plagued by this guilt's phantasm so persistently that she is imprisoned in the unsolvable horrific recollection of this horrific incident: "Once more, I sense her father's head underneath my foot, hear him gasping for air, and observe the blood clot on his broken face" (191). Kate's Promise's single heroic act throughout the battle directly results from her background, culture, and civilian life that stands against the military identity and concept of "killing"(33,172,218). Kate is forced to choose between a novel-changed consciousness—being both human and nonhuman—when she is attacking or being attacked. Her traumatized psyche is forced to choose between two opposing ways of seeing the world: either she should be disillusioned with war and see its ridiculousness, losing the capacity to see beyond its anguish and misery, or she should be captivated with war and find some kind of strength in its ferocity(Goodell, 2011, p.48). Killing, torturing prisoners, abusing corpses, seeing a buddy slaughtered, and all the misery of war lead to the practice of a moral dilemma that penetrates post-traumatic stress disorder.

War's acts might be seen as the outgrowth of Kate's trauma, which leaves her with resentment, hatred, and shame that "sit stinking inside of [her] all the time" (163). In particular, Kate's sentiments of guilt make her feel "too filthy" (177) to the point that she believes that nothing she does or believes will stop "the black ooze" (11) of her shame from spreading "through her organs like a poison" (182). The horrific image of "a dog eating a human hand" is stored in her mind, for example. "I was chewing on it like a rubber toy" (140). Kate's recollection remembers additional horrible events as she travels to Baquba with her military convoy; she sees "blood and shredded flesh [spread] everywhere[...] smashed bodies, the vulture devouring a youngster. [A] wretched child with his limb ripped apart" (202). These tragic incidents serve as raw materials for Kate's post-traumatic stress disorder to stamp her identity at home. They are deftly used to illustrate how location shaped Kate's terrible experiences and the development of her PTSD. This is evident in the way Kate's body and psyche are perpetually haunted by the ghosts of war back home.

The harshness of the military self and its ongoing conflict with the kind version of the civilian one serve as representations of the concept of in-between. A "ragged blue wing, zigzagging torn and crooked across the long, black sky" is how Kate describes her broken awareness (68). Kate finds it difficult to finish reading a letter that Tyler writes to her about his music, even if it is written in an affectionate tone. This highlights how she has been effectively cut off from her former self by her new military identity, which was formed in Iraq "the land of the fucking dead" (176). From one perspective, she understands very well that she would never be able to spend the rest of her life if she loses the "best side" (226) of herself that Tyler represents. Nonetheless, she sees his message as "shit" amid this nightmare, where she feels as though she "will be stuck forever" (126). Eventually, she comes to hate her identity as a female and as a human. The dramatic demise of Yvette while serving in the military in Baquba sets the stage for settling the conflict between the two identities. Yvette's spirit fully controlling her senses settles the conflict in favor of the military identity. Every waking and sleeping moment, Yvette's death haunts her. She can't get rid of the image of her face everywhere she looks, her fingers all over her body, her blood on her lips, and her voice urging her to serve as a soldier. Simply put, she is tormented by the memories of Yvette and cannot escape her presence.

Kate, who is observing the prison and its inmates, compares Prynne's meek standing on the scaffold to her passive standing on the tower; both situations are dehumanizing and humiliating; rather than being a highly esteemed and impressive soldier, Kate alternates between the convicts who fling excrement at her and her allies who inform on her alleged promiscuity. Her emotional and cognitive capacities are compromised due to the extreme psychological disturbance she is experiencing. The pleasant tone Tyler employs to call her is not reflected in her traumatized reaction when he sees her at the mental health facility. She first "flinches" and then "scoots to the far side of the bed, pulls herself to her feet and backs up against the wall" (29). She uses her body as a coping mechanism to deal with the trauma that has damaged her sense of self and her faith in other people and the world. All of these traumatic emotions eventually prompt Kate to declare the passing of the woman she once was and the replacing of that person with "a true military robot soldier", who feels "hard and strong and cold inside—a robot soldier who knows whom he hates and whom he wants to kill and all the rest is rubbish" (225). Kate is made to feel like an object, a kind of life that refuses to go in the path of sincerity. In addition, Kate's sentiments of remorse and filth dehumanize her military persona. She connects herself with Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* protagonist, Hester Prynne, in a way that highlights this "That novel we studied in high school, about the girl who had to get up on a pillory so the entire town could laugh at her and hurl things at her because she had slept with a priest or whatever, reminds me of Hester Prynne. I'm not as noble or patient as she is, though" (141).

It's like a defense mechanism that Kate used to be able to endure her life in the army. Throughout history, because Austen's works on "shattered minds" are seen by Claudia Johnson (2001) as "rehabilitative", and by Favret (2008) as "restorative therapy", doctors recommended her books to military soldiers during and after World War I. How females deal with their psychological trauma varies according to the individuals and circumstances, reading novels is one of these strategies as well as committing to some psychical and breathing workouts, sleeping, or talking to someone who trusts are all different ways of coping. Kate persists in her novels to escape from reality; also, she tries to write letters to her family and try to call them by phone. *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen's work, which Kate occasionally reads and tries to read, is how she sees and feels the beauty of her earlier life—that of the civilian. Although the elements of Austen's home and romantic world are equivalent to those of Kate's civilian world, her second life's elements—the military life and the horrific experiences—stand in stark contrast to her first one. The battle zone builds her traumatized identity and her post-traumatic stress impairment, which is incarnated in the novel's third narrative voice. In Austen's work, the parks and gardens show a gorgeous and calm setting, reflecting the intrinsic beauty of America's geography. The desert of Camp Bucca, on the other hand, is characterized by a scorching sun that appears to roast the sky. The depiction of birds being enveloped in flames and falling to the ground, charred and releasing smoke, highlights the severe and deadly conditions. The troops stationed there inhale a toxic mixture of bomb smoke, depleted uranium, burning corpses, oil, and other disturbing stuff, forcing them to flee to far-flung corners to meet their untimely demise. Many themes of *Pride and Prejudice* that connect to concepts of peace and love are juxtaposed with Kate's everyday anguish in the conflict zone. In Austen's universe, the marriage plot and Kate's early childhood are notably juxtaposed with scenes of sexual harassment, and

mansions and houses with barracks, love, and familial warmth with blood and explosions. All of her antagonisms have shaped her new identity, one that has imprisoned her in an insoluble account of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (55). Kate dealt with her trauma and bad psychological conditions through alleviation of suffering and memories of masculinity violence by reading romantic books; something that remind her of her femininity.

According to research published in the journal *Psychological Science*, women who deal with trauma by reading Jane Austen's works heal emotionally better than those who do not. The study, undertaken by experts at the University of California, Berkeley, discovered that reading Austen novels assisted women in processing their emotions and developing coping strategies for dealing with trauma. According to research published in the journal *Psychological Science*, women who deal with trauma by reading Jane Austen's works heal emotionally better than those who do not. The study, undertaken by experts at the University of California, Berkeley, discovered that reading Austen novels assisted women in processing their emotions and developing coping strategies for dealing with trauma. Pamela Regan, the study's primary author, stated: "Jane Austen's works are full of strong, resilient women who overcome obstacles and achieve happiness. This may be a strong message for women who have been traumatized. Reading Austen's books might help them recognize that they are not alone and that it is possible for them to recover and go on". (Regan,2016)

The symbolism of Austin's novel to be as a friend for Kate in her terrified time didn't come out of thin air since Austin's books were considered as athreptic tools for wartime to escape from the scenes of barbarity; Kipling (1924, p.52-53) stated that "The Janeites [ in connection to Jane Austin works] reminds us that there is no better cure for what ails you than to turn to "Jane when you're in a tight place".

As a soldier, Kate's critical discourse subtly holds President Bush, the head of the US political system, accountable for the country's involvement in Iraq and, consequently, for the formation of her traumatized identity: "President Bush, the daddy of the monkey faces who got me into this war" (183). Even though the United States of America prevailed in the Iraq War, Peebles stated that "the social and political sense of victory that followed would provide no lasting satisfaction" (Peebles,2022, p.36-37). It's true that a lot of troops, like Kate, still feel as though they are in a collective sense of trauma in Iraq which they consider as the source of their trauma. The reality Kate experiences as a result of her firsthand experience with the horrors of war is a monster that badly targets both sides: women and soldiers. The question presents itself, why does a young female leave her decent life, school, cozy family, and her fiancée to be just a masculine version of a pre-feminine who kills people mad shatters their families? Ironically Naema asked Kate the reason for joining the arms mentioning that "Soldiers take life. Women give life" (63). The answers vary; yet Kate provides some incidents of what her Dad said: "You'll grow up in the Army". This was back in March 2000, way before 9/11, so none of us was thinking about war" (39); "Obey the will of God"; "A soldier is asked to lay down his life for others, just as Jesus did" (40). Kate's primary motivation for enlisting in the army was her desire for social recognition. Kate thought she was living a flimsy illusion, even if her life appeared to be regular. She was fed up with being the lovely, considerate, and submissive girl that society expected of her. She yearned to be acknowledged, heard, and recognized as a significant member. She needed to pierce the thin

veneer and feel like she belonged, and joining the army was one way to do that. As she declared “I wanted to do something impressive like that, something that’d make people sit up and take notice” (37). She craved both meeting her father’s dream and being respected and acknowledged by others. Kate was raised in a traditional religious household in a small town. Her father worked as a police officer, and she said “He was always proud when I did stuff like a boy: joined the track team, ran hurdles, or anything like that” (38). She could not wait to inform her father of the decision as soon as she made it. She was also greatly impacted by her father. When she was younger, she pulled her father’s rifle from the sideboard and held it so she could feel “its heft, its power. Feel the reverence it earned for him”. Further to the reasons outlined above, money is one of the motivations for American youth (male and female) since most of them have to fund their university education (63).

Kate’s choice to join the army was significantly inspired by the feminist movement. She was attracted to the prospect of establishing her strength and competence. She stated before enlisting in the army, “I liked feeling strong and capable”, which makes this clear. I like establishing my worth (43). Kate never wavered in her commitment to her independence and self-reliance, even in the face of a horrible experience like a superior officer trying to rape her. She denied Jimmy Donell’s assistance, adding “I want to look after myself, I am a soldier, after all” (73). This is how feminism has impacted the traditional depiction. Zhang (1999, p.115) remarked “Gender inequality was not innate, but social convention and culture made it”. Her main motivation for enlisting in the army was her desire to dispel stereotypes about gender and show that women are capable of fighting. She was determined not to be disregarded or underestimated because of her gender, as seen by her unwillingness to accept help from male soldiers. Kate’s choice was also influenced by her ignorance of the difficulties encountered by women in combat, which was masked by the army recruiter’s glorified picture of military duty. This demonstrates how the general public felt about women serving in the US military in Iraq. When women enlisted in the army, they were usually allocated to non-combat duties since they were not seen as competent combatants. Kate, as a product of her social context, would not have expected to be assaulted by her male colleagues. This event highlights the absence of agency and voice for female soldiers—a minority demographic in the US military—as well. Their stories went unheard, so no one would truly be aware of their actual circumstances. Perhaps the most problematic feature of this military organization concerning sexual differences is the absence of institutional support and policy-based gratitude to advance a culture of sexual equality. (Department of Defense Washington DC, 2010, p.137).

The lies of the Government or the stereotypical social norms proved its authenticity in real war zones, as declared by Francoise Davoine “was quickly destroyed by the confrontations with war’s realities” (Caruth, 2014, p.84). Because war is unrepresentable, Kate feels as though she is trapped in a nightmare that will never end. Indeed, the whole experience is “a nightmare here. I mean it’s real but it’s not real” (226) because of the terrifying nature of the everyday encounter with death. The American soldiers became aware that they were deceived and misled during and after the war and being “Used as a tool for the U.S government to sell the war, they played roles as if in Hollywood; they discovered that battle spurred the ruthless character of certain soldiers, and as opposed to the “band of

brothers and sisters” they were intended to be, they were “no more than a band of snakes”.(86). According to the report titled *President Bush's Intelligence: The Failure of Intelligence in Pre-War Iraq* was published by the Senate Intelligence Committee in 2006. It was concluded in the report that the Bush administration had “misused” intelligence to support the invasion of Iraq and that the intelligence community had “failed” to fairly evaluate Iraq's WMD program. The risks associated with serving in Iraq were minimized by the US administration, and many soldiers were not sufficiently prepared for the realities of combat (Ramchand et al., 2010)). As a result, there were several physical and psychological casualties. Generally, The Americans was being confused about the Western World especially after the 11 September attack in which the mass media played a vital role to misguide them with the lack of information; it is a brainwash that government employed to shadow their imperial plans to dominate petrol and nuclear power. (Al-Hilfi, 2023, p.27)

Kate's experience feels like a hefty burden that she must bear. Her lips become a grimace as it presses into her neck. Her expression turns taut and still, and her voice disappears. She can't control her body because of her trauma; it's like a poison coursing through her veins. It is implied that this bodily sickness exists in the soldier's story at the mental health facility. Kate is dragged out of her bed by the hospital nurse because it is “wet and reeking” (17). Kate intentionally prays to God to “not piss her pants” (186) because she feels ashamed of this illness. This is, in reality, an extra trauma embodied by her post-traumatic stress disorder. This was approved by Herman (1992, p. 9) who recognized the importance of “social context” for trauma survivors. By using the method of anonymity, “The Soldier”, who is like Kate, conveys the denial of the social setting and metaphorically represents being cut off from kinfolk and the surrounding social milieu. In this sense, Kate is distinguished by her ruined identity. The fact that “The Soldier” walks away from her mother who tries to hug her is a rejection of the social setting. Kate's verbal and physical aggression also reflects her refusal of social engagement. When Tyler informs “The Soldier” that her parents would like to see her, that is when verbal hostility is identified. She refers to their benefits as “fucking blessings”(43) when she expresses her distaste. Additionally, she exhibits violent behavior when she hurls the bible her father gives her “at the vase, send[ing] yellow petals and shards of glass flying all over the room” (112). Her prayers are focused on “not hurting anybody” and “not doing something dumb” (187), as she is plagued by worries “hear cars backfire...a shout or a scream” or “see a soldier” (186). A symptom of Kate's trauma is her refusal to stay at the hospital. Another shape of her PTSD is she starts blaming even her father who was the most supporter of her decision to join the army. Maybe, she was not emotionally mature enough to make a life-changing decision such as joining the military since she was nearing her 19<sup>th</sup>. She could think that her father did not take her worries seriously, and did not adequately prepare her for the reality of war. She could also believe that he was responsible for her trauma. Last but not least, it's possible that she is lashing out at him to avoid facing her feelings of resentment and irritation. Being in a “disorder of non-realization” allows Kate to avoid being “The Soldier”. Her painful recollections are primarily to blame for this situation. She is also heavily influenced by the conviction that she must protect her younger sister, April. As a result, she pulls her father's rifle and fires the ghosts' faces.

Kate's traumatized psyche is crystallized in the gothic trope of being plagued by ghosts, which represents her troubled consciousness. Through the windows of her parents' dining room, she sees the faces of battle ghosts peering back at her. These are the faces of Mr. Al-Jubur, the Iraqi prisoner, and the soldiers who attempted to rape her. Through the exacerbation of emotional dysregulation and the blockage of people's ability to integrate their experiences, trauma can obstruct social engagement and therapeutic development. This is due to the fact that trauma can produce hypervigilance and emotional sensitivity, which can make it challenging to build meaningful social relationships and trust people. Furthermore, trauma can affect cognitive function, making it challenging to comprehend and process one's experiences. The severe symptoms of post-trauma it's not a small matter, but it's much worse.

In a joint work by Groth et al. (1977, p.38) who targeted the rape victims, their findings assured that the post syndromes of survivors/victims vary depending on the person such as nightmares, flashbacks, and backward physical and emotional idiosyncratic reactions. In addition to stressing that rape is a violent crime rather than a sexual offense, they detailed the victims' varied clothing choices and physical appeal. In other cases, this perspective is made clear, such as when rules for speaking with victims are provided: "Talk about the concerns of power, control, fury, and aggression—the prominent elements of the assault—in a nonjudgmental manner". Burgess and Holmstrom (1974, 1979) underlined that rape victims may demonstrate a range of typical reactions, from apparent tranquility to visible despair. They discussed the victims' requirements in terms of their physical, emotional, and psychological states during each of the three phases of rehabilitation. Acute fear is the hallmark of the first stage, often known as the immediate phase. Disorganization is the hallmark of the second stage, which may also entail upsetting flashbacks of the attack. The third stage, known as the reorganization phase, can have a very variable duration. Additionally, "compounded" and "silent" rape responses were reported by Burgess and Holmstrom. The former fits Herman's description of "complex PTSD".

According to Koss and Gidycz (1985), a woman's decision to reveal her rape was unrelated to her personality or sentiments regarding the crime. Rather, the rape's circumstances played a more significant role. Compared to women who were raped by a stranger, women who were raped by a boyfriend or acquaintance were less likely to disclose the incident. What Kate felt is obvious that the incidents of rape towards females cannot be swept under the rug, they should raise their voices and show the world what males do at even the most prestigious positions. The protagonist of the novel "The Soldier", for instance, exhibits her emotional response to trauma by refusing to converse with the other veterans in the therapy circle. This implies that her trauma is keeping her from interacting with people in a way that is essential to her recovery. "The Soldier" believes that the "other losers" she must share her horrific experiences with are just "assholes" as none of them have considered what it means to be a female veteran in a combat zone. For Kate, the hospital is a place of misery even if it is a place of healing and rehabilitation. The hospital evokes memories of Iraq for her, and she cannot perceive it as a place of hope. She cannot listen to any similar miserable story from other female soldiers as she cannot endure hearing any more about male tyrannizing. Kate feels that this kind of treatment belongs in a mental institution, thus she

does not want to take part in a rehabilitation program. Her identity does not fit into this place; thus, she rejects it. She is not weak, and she wants no part of this place to have an impact on her. Her identities as a lady and a soldier are incompatible with the features of life in this location. She decides to escape (132). Kate “escaped” and stated unequivocally her disdain for the psychiatric hospital and its staff. There was no way she could live there under this roof with them, or even be one of them. This location’s features contribute to unhappiness, despair, and surrender to the identities of women coming from war. Although other females’ IDs had matched the location, Kate was not the same. Her identity ran counter to the place’s and the women’s identities. She had no desire to discuss her background or the experiences she had faced. She declined to share them with others, preferring to keep them to herself. This setting brought back memories of her former battalion when every soldier was known to everyone else.

The syndrome of post-trauma that Kates went through dispelled the myths that if a woman “really did not want to be raped”, then the rape can be avoided. This is a destructive and deadly misunderstanding. It is never the victim's fault—rape is a crime of violence and power. She was in the middle of men's world and for whom she can ask for help? It is counterintuitive that some people think rape does not harm women. However, an honorable lady would go insane if she were raped. Violent crimes like rape may have a terrible effect on a victim’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Fears of shame and stigma, of not being believed, of being traumatized again, and of not having support are some of the reasons why women who have suffered trauma in conflict frequently refuse to discuss their experiences. Given the intensity and complexity of the trauma that women in conflict endure, these worries are reasonable. Women who choose not to discuss their trauma should be respected for their decision and supported in other ways. Anderson (2006) emphasized that women who have suffered from the trauma of war are frequently ostracized and disgraced by society at large as well as by their society. They might be concerned that others would perceive them as weak, damaged, or even dirty if they discuss their experiences. In societies where female dignity and purity are highly valued, this dread may be more acute. Even those closest to women frequently downplay or ignore the hardship they endured during wartime. A joint workshop report sponsored by the UN concluded that individuals can fear that if they share their stories, no one will listen to them or believe them. The likelihood that women may experience sexual assault during a conflict is higher than that of males, and this mistrust and denial can make this worry worse (World Bank, 2001, p.14). Reluctance to talk about war trauma is not a common trait among women who have experienced it. Speaking about their experiences can be therapeutic for some women in processing and healing from them.

Based on a shared social perspective, their characterization of rape as a societal issue necessitates societal intervention, including individual victim assistance as well as institutional and social policy adjustments. Advocates campaign in the fullest sense, they offered immediate assistance for trauma on both a physical and emotional level in addition to supporting women in court who want to pursue legal action. (Webster & Dunn, 2005, p.114). Arora (2019, p.1) asserted that she-gender’s vulnerability is comparable to living in a perpetual state of war, defending one’s fundamental human rights, not just those of women, without regard to national or cultural boundaries. If proper measures aren't implemented,

crimes against women will continue to be committed, as there is already a war going on against mankind. In contemporary times, a significant number of nations have completely incorporated women into their armed forces, enabling them to serve in combat and non-combat jobs without any gender-based limitations. While progress has been achieved, issues such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and discrepancies in career growth keep popping up in various military sections, emphasizing the constant need for societal adjustments and gender equality endeavors. The history of women serving as soldiers in the military demonstrates their dedication, perseverance, and evolving cultural perceptions. There has been a marked improvement in women's standing in the military this century, which is indicative of a societal push for diversity and equality in leadership roles.

The RAND Corporation offers the following recommendations in their statement for treating PTSD in female military personnel: Give female military members access to psychological therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that are effective in studies, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) (EMDR), visual relaxation, and rehabilitation. There is an Administer pharmacological treatment for female veterans to alleviate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as bereavement and anxiety. And finally, help them to find social resources like family and group support. (The War Within, n.d)

## **Conclusion**

The complicated and little-researched problem of violence against military women in conflict areas needs more attention. Female soldiers are often the victims of sexual assault, which may have detrimental effects on their physical and mental health. A culture of impunity contributes significantly to this abuse, and female soldiers are often unwilling to report it for fear of embarrassment or retaliation. It is accurate that female troops are mistreated during times of war, as the novel depicts in explicit terms. Kate's narrative exemplifies her determination and capacity to endure, while also shedding awareness on the profound consequences of acts of violence committed against women in the military. Furthermore, it delves into the many factors that contribute to violence against female troops in war. Gender stereotypes, conventional gender roles, and the prevalence of machismo in the military are all contributing elements. As a weapon of war, violence toward female troops demonstrates how a rival is often vanquished and demoralized. Sexual assault against female troops is more common in an environment where offenders go unpunished. Since abusers are never held responsible, victims often demonstrate aggression out of embarrassment or fear of punishment. The global community must enhance its dedication to preventing acts of violence against female soldiers and ensuring that those guilty of such acts are held accountable. To put an end to this brutality, it is imperative that we critically examine the indoctrination of masculinity and conventional gender standards inside the military against troops is a severe problem since it jeopardizes national security and military performance. Female soldiers often fail to focus on their responsibilities and are at risk of injury or death if they are not adequately safeguarded. Furthermore, it weakens military unity and spirit. The protagonist Kate Brady in Helen Benedict's novel *Sand Queen* suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of being abducted and sexually raped by military soldiers. In addition to having anxiety, nightmares, and flashbacks, she finds it difficult to interact with

her loved surroundings. Kate undergoes both psychological and physical anguish throughout the novel. She is physically harmed by the rape and experiences a range of unpleasant feelings, including shame, remorse, and rage. Additionally, she finds it hard to believe that she was sexually attacked in an environment where the greatest standards of safety should be in place. Because of her PTSD, Kate finds it difficult to lead a normal life. Both concentrating and falling asleep are difficult for her, and she regularly has feelings of isolation and alienation. Additionally, she has difficulty developing profound connections. Kate maintains a cheerful outlook despite the adversities she faces. She progressively musters the bravery to seek therapy for PTSD and starts the arduous process of rebuilding her life. Additionally, she becomes an advocate for other individuals who have experienced sexual assault. Ultimately, the portrayal of Kate Brady's anguish in *Sand Queen* serves as a compelling testament to the profound impact that war inflicts upon women. The story also underscores the tenacity of the human spirit and the need to receive treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ironically, Iraq is connected with femininity and war with masculinity.

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