

Deconstructing the Discursive Frames of the ‘War on Terror’ in Evan Wright’s *Generation Kill*

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Abstract

Relatively few studies have systematically examined the ways literary novels are interrelated and interconnected with media’s structuring of meaning. This paper analyzes *Generation Kill* 2004, the narrative of Evan Wright who was an embedded reporter that joined a Platoon of First Recon Marines during the first two months of the invasion on Iraq, on its debunking of discursive media frames of the ‘War on Terror’. This article employed close reading to answer how *Generation Kill* blurs the boundary between fact and fiction and how it challenges media’s framing of Muslims as barbarous terrorists. In addition to this, *Generation Kill* deflates the American Exceptionalism frame by showing its insincerity and falsehood. Analysis revealed that Western media intentionally structured several dominant frames that represented Muslims as terrorist ‘other’ and represented Americans as exceptional. The study, however, concludes that Wright’s literary representation of the war experience helped debunk media’s discursive frames that were driven and influenced by racial discriminations and Islamophobia.

Key words: ‘War on Terror’, Framing, Islamophobia, the Other, American Exceptionalism

Introduction

Western mainstream media have established specific frames to promote the ‘War on Terror’ rhetoric among the Western public post -9/11. This study argues that Evan Wright’s *Generation Kill* (2004) challenges two of the predominant frames during the invasion on Iraq in 2003. The frames are: ‘Muslims are irrational perpetrators inspired by a wicked religion’, and ‘America’s Exceptionalism drives America to

safeguard its primacy through military power with no consideration to any economic benefits'. *Generation Kill* debunks the afore-mentioned frames by different means. It disrupts the prevailing discursive frame of Muslims' innate tendency to terror by projecting the violence and cruelty of American troops. Shockingly, American soldiers exhibited uncontrollable desire to terrorizing Iraqis and murdering them. Wright also questions this frame by depicting the experiences of Iraqi civilians and by humanizing them. Also, the novel deconstructs the frame of American Exceptionalism by exposing the real materialistic and economic benefits of the war. In addition to this, the novel pinpoints the inhumane treatment and torture of Iraqi civilians who were not given the democracy and liberation they were promised by the U.S. administration.

To investigate the war on Iraq from a new different perspective, the research provides a historical background to the 'War on Terror' and how it was ushered and promoted by the Bush's administration. Then, it explains Framing theory and how it structured certain frames to illicit the public's support for the administration's foreign policy in Iraq. It also discusses the frames' connectedness with Islamophobia, followed by the examination of how the novel reacts to these frames by offering close readings of the text involved. This paper is intended to provide a thorough case study analysis of the novel depicting an opposing literary reaction of the discursive media frames in its handling of the war on Iraq.

Evan Wright (born 1966) is an American writer who writes for *Rolling Stone* and *Vanity Fair*. He started his career writing for *Hustler* magazine, where he served as "Entertainment Editor." In the 1990's he started writing feature articles for *Rolling Stone* that concentrated on youth subcultures. Wright has reported on the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq as an embedded reporter for *Rolling Stone*. He accompanied the First Recon Battalion which was one of the first units deployed in and entering Iraq in 2003. To portray the struggles and terrors of war zone, Wright documented his experience as an embedded reporter in his book *Generation Kill* (2004) which was adapted later into a mini-series. He was awarded with two National magazine awards for reporting, one for reporting on the war in Iraq in *Rolling Stone* and the other for a profile published in *Vanity Fair*. He also won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for *Generation Kill* in 2004.

The 'War on Terror'

While literally thousands of texts have been written on the subject of the invasion of Iraq, "there still remains a shortage of certain types of writings" (Bollinger, 2014, 2). As Michael Lukas wondered back in 2010: "after nearly a decade of US soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, it seems reasonable to ask: where is the literature of our current conflict?" (208). He then speculates that the "literature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has yet to emerge" (208). With nearly 17 years since the invasion, the literature discussing the war on Iraq is still limited and has had insufficient academic treatment, with most research referring primarily to trauma theory post- 9/11 attacks or the discussion of media's portrayal of the 'War on Terror'. However, there is a distinct lack of attention towards the portrayal of these frames in fiction. One of the key by-products of this study is to highlight a major gap in the study of the influence of the 'War on Terror' on fiction. While analyzing the 'War on Terror' frames is highly important, it is not the purpose of this study to focus on media's portrayal of the war for several reasons. Firstly, such an examination had been thoroughly discussed by academic studies such as, Semmerling (2008), Goy (2008), Rojecki (2009), McLeod (2010), Morey and Yaqin (2011), Kimberly (2011, 2018), Kassimeris and Jackson (2011) and others. Secondly such an analysis would be more strongly connected to studies in the field of journalism, foreign politics and Agenda-setting studies. Hence, analyzing how fiction has responded to these frames would be of a great value and it would highlight the relationship between media and fiction. Because of the

impact and significance of media on the developments happening of this crucial era, a serious research and study is needed.

In the wake of 9/11 attacks, a new world order has been imposed. The world has witnessed a remarkable change that compelled the media to pinpoint the enemy. Bartone (2006) notes that the Western media framed the post- 9/11 attacks as “the inciting incident in a larger narrative” (21). The falling of the towers signified the fall of security and stability. Kowal (2012) argues that the attacks “marked the beginning of the 21st century in every aspect of global culture from politics to art” (3). News media outlets kept on transferring the images of destruction repeatedly. Bakali (2016) states that the media created a “spectacle, a media event in which there was a seemingly endless amount of news coverage of these attacks” (69). From the very beginning, media’s comprehension of the attacks was problematic. It offered no explanations of the attacks and was signified with lack of information and imprecision. In the aftermath of the attacks, the media and the public were mesmerized by the unanticipated, horrific events (King, 2014, 8). Therefore, it was essential to seek for an explanation from the commander-in-chief, president Bush. Uncritically, Bush’s tale of a violent ‘other’ was quickly accepted among the public. Bush’s administration continued to link al-Qaeda to the Iraqi government and warned the public from the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Sanger& Burns, 2003).

Bush’s discourse on the ‘War on Terror’ defines the problem clearly: “9/11 terrorist attacks have been ‘acts of war’ against the ‘civilized world’ carried out by terrorists driven by hatred of freedom and democracy” (Azpiroz, 2013, 192). The ‘other’, as President Bush claims, “hates us for our freedom” (2001). He vowed on Sunday to “rid the world of evil-doers,” then cautioned: “This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while” (2001). According to this rhetoric, this crusade was directed against Islamists, Jihadists, radicals, Fundamentalists, Fascists who are commanded by their directives to “kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children (Bush, 2001). These Fascists were continually linked to terrorism that was depicted as a threat to US national security. Hayes (2003) argues that after the attacks, American national security policy “changed from one of deterrence and response to one that endorses preemptive strike against terrorists of global reach” (453). Alsultany (2012) notes that Bush Administration needed to “frame the ways that people across the country thought about and talked about the events of 9/11 and the ways that they should respond to such events” (7). Framing the causes of the invasion in a pre-determined manner has become a powerful organizing principal which led to the acceptance and support for the invasion by the American public.

Bush’s rhetoric was then adopted by mainstream media which repeatedly circulated the administration’s existing attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. Fascism was seen as an intrinsic feature of Islam by which terrorism and Islamic identity have been inextricably linked in the media. Powell (2011) argues that an analysis of episodic news frames of terrorist events since 9/11 “demonstrates how thematic coverage of terrorism has developed through frames composed of labels, common themes, and rhetorical associations” (94). In their analysis of Western news texts from the period of 2001 to early 2006, Reese and Lewis (2009) suggest that the ‘War on Terror’ frame was internalized by the U.S. press (777). They explain that news and editorial reports “went beyond ‘transmitting’ the war on terror as shorthand for the administration’s policy, to ‘reify’ the policy as uncontested, and ‘naturalize’ it as a taken-for-granted common-sense notion” (777). The process of normalization has been instrumental in gaining support and encouragement. Therefore, the political and media discourses in relation to the ‘War on Terror’ have become linked. Western media pundits established an unjustified correlation between Islam and extreme violence within specific frames that drifted into some form of Islamophobia and prejudice.

Framing

Framing refers to “subtle alternations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems and the term ‘framing effects’ refers to changes in decision outcomes resulting from these alternations” (Iyengar, 1991, 11). These alternations emphasize certain factors over others and can affect recipients of information and can construct their opinions about certain issues. Crow and Lawlor (2016) note that media interact with and influence the policy process in two paramount ways: (1) by selecting issues of importance to highlight to the public and policy makers (agenda-setting), and (2) by problematizing policy in a way that attaches meaning to it in a manner that is comprehensible (framing) (472). While agenda-setting gives priority to a certain issue by frequent reporting, framing is more concerned with ‘how’ the issue is presented by the media. Framing associates a particular issue with a cluster of meaning which gives prominence of one idea over another. Norris (2003) notes that “events are commonly understood through news frames that simplify, prioritize, and structure the narrative flow of events” (10). The process of framing could lead to the reporting of news from a particular perspective. In this sense, some aspects of the situation “come into close focus and others fade into the background” (Graber, 2002, 173). Media outlets intentionally select the ways their news is delivered and they define what is necessary and what is unnecessary. This process entails the act of highlighting one aspect of a particular event while excluding other aspects (Entman, 1993, Jacoby, 2000). How events and issues are packaged and presented by journalists can fundamentally affect how these events are understood by the readers and viewers.

Framing is an intended process that serves many functions. Media frames have provided policy makers with explanatory tools that help them interpret world events. Price (1997) argues that these frames often “reflect broader cultural themes and narratives and they supply citizens with a basic tool kit of ideas they use in thinking about and talking about politics” (482). It is part of what Teresa La Porte (2011) calls a public diplomacy which is “the art of cultivating public opinion in order to achieve foreign policy goals” (13). In this case, the governments usually resort to media as the main channel to promote political discourse and to modify the understanding of the people. McLeod (2002) adds that as part of this surveillance function, the media do more than just provide a conduit for information; they “play an important gatekeeping role in determining the relative importance of events and issues by judging their potential impact on society” (114). Media actively affect the publics’ opinion and influence agendas by framing policy issues and presenting narratives in any possible means that serve their purposes. In the building-up for the ‘War on terror’, mainstream media constantly revived Islamophobia sentiments that redefined Islam as the ultimate enemy to the civilized ‘West’.

Stephen Sheehi (2011) defines Islamophobia as an ideological formation that is created by a culture employing a fixed set of tropes and beliefs (226). These beliefs about Muslims have been circulated by media outlets and political organizations that are collectively involved in the dissemination and normalization of anti-Muslim bias in Western contexts. Shryock (2010) argues that the term “Islamophobia” could reasonably be applied to “any setting in which people hate Muslims, or fear Islam, but the word is most frequently invoked, and has its richest connotation, when it is used to describe a sentiment that flourishes in contemporary Europe and North America” (2). These Islamophobic tendencies result from historical conflictual relationship between the West and the East in which the ‘West’ is being opposed to the ‘East’. This mode of thought entails that Muslims are devoid from reason or rationality. Bakali (2016) notes that “Muslims have been repeatedly presented as ‘violent’, ‘misogynistic’, and inclined towards terrorism” (14). The British report, The Runnymede Trust (1997), defines Islamophobia as an “unfounded hostility towards Islam” (4). It refers also to “the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities” (4). The report explains that this unfounded hostility towards Islam would lead to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs. Islamophobia

was fostered during the colonization of Islamic states, but it gained a special attention post -9/11 attacks and during the 'War on Terror'.

Said (1978) argues that these negative constructions can be traced back to the expansion of Western imperialism when the relationship between occident and orient is a "relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (13). The orient was perceived as 'retarded', 'backward', and 'evil-driven'. Said also adds that Orientalism not only "creates but also maintains a certain will or intension to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different world" (22). Orientalism was built on a dichotomy of 'West' versus 'East' in which Muslims were portrayed as an "evil other" whose values and culture were inferior and degraded. This dichotomy was further intensified by Huntington's notion of a clash of civilizations. Huntington (1993) argues that the "fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (22). This indicates that peoples' religious and cultural identities will lead to unprecedented conflicts between countries worldwide. The ideological polarization is replaced by culturally defined cultural clashes. Bantimarovdis (2015) notes that Huntington's argument was regarded as a "guide for political analysis by policy-makers and media outlets, especially after September 11, 2001" (74). Media outlets have shown clear integration of Islamophobia in their framing of the 'War on Terror'. First, they intentionally linked Muslims with terror and claimed that Islam promotes violence, hostility and barbarism. Second, they celebrated the frame of America's exceptional qualities in comparison with barbaric, uncivilized 'other'. The next section of the paper explains the frames under discussion and shows how they were incorporated by the media. This is followed by investigating how Wright's *Generation Kill* challenged these frames and proved their falsehood.

Media's Framing of 'them' versus 'us'

The framing of Muslims as predators has become part of a global narrative and dominant discourse in the reporting of various events. Western representations of Muslims utilized images of brutality and vulgarity with assumed affinity with tyranny. In her analysis of the representation of Muslims in *The Times* between 1994 and 2003, Elizabeth Poole (2006) points out that the attention to Muslim issues has become a global phenomenon, with an increase of international reporting on Islam, particularly on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. She adds that the representation of Islam after 9/11 has created a "unified conservative view in the media, based on an orientalist global construction of Islam" (102). Kristen Mogenson (2007) notes that journalist from major media outlets "consciously chose not to be objective, neutral, or impartial" (314). Journalists have put special interest in the terrorists' religious connotations. The media created a climate in which dehumanizing images of the enemy were seen as legitimate or even necessary (Keen, 2006, 143). Mainstream media in the U.S. have identified a clear pattern of Islam feeding orientalism in which fear of Islam was heightened. Powell (2011) remarks that the image of the evil Muslim created a climate of fear among the population which "attracts government attention, economic resources, and military resources of fighting a 'War on Terror'" (92). Promoting fear of Muslims was instrumental and intentional. It has been established to turn the public fear to the administration's advantage. Western media shaped the identity of Muslims as alien 'other' and did not allow a true understanding of their being to emerge.

Morey and Yaqin (2011) argue that Muslims are framed as "irrational perpetrators of religion-inspired wickedness" (22). Mainstream media tied the motive behind terrorist attacks with the mission of Islamic terrorist organizations. Liz Jackson (2010) argues that associating Muslims with terrorism is recognized in the mainstream media as "reasonable or acceptable, rather than as harmful to Muslims, who face discrimination, prejudice, and hatefulness" (22). Said (1997) remarks how Islam is "covered by a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés" (156). He adds that there is an incitement to discourse

about Islam, which “canonizes certain notions, texts and authorities” confirming its “medieval,” “dangerous,” and “hostile” nature” (156). It can be concluded that the majority of coverage through photos and words reinforce negative images of Muslims and Islam, and therefore, the audience is likely to conclude that Muslims are terrorists. Moreover, Western media intentionally revived the American exceptionalism frame which constituted America as exceptional and remarkably distinguished in comparison with barbaric ‘other’.

The American Exceptionalism frame suggests that America’s history, values and political system are distinguished and worthy of imitating. This frame assumes that the United States is entitled to “fight ... for a just peace—a peace that favors human liberty... building this just peace is America’s duty” (Bush, 2002). Singh (2015) argues that the United States under the Bush administration framed itself as the “guardian and upholder of democratic values seeking to preserve a liberal way of life” (100). In addition to this, it is driven by a great moral cause to enlighten world nations into democracy and liberty. The 9/11 attacks were framed as an exceptional acts of terror and an unprecedented national tragedy. It was argued that America was attacked because it was “the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world” (Bush, 2001). Thus, constructing 9/11 as exceptional, the Bush administration not only underscored the unique and privileged status of the U.S. but also “justified illiberal policy under the Global War on Terror as the legitimate and necessary response of an exceptional nation-state” (Singh, 110). The United States is described as ‘empire of liberty’, ‘the last hope of Earth’ and the ‘leader of the free world’ because it is endowed with the unique qualities of modernity, democracy and freedom.

Many explanations were offered to define the frame of American exceptionalism. Patman (2006) explains that the idea of US exceptionalism refers to an “informal ideology that endows Americans with a pervasive faith in the uniqueness, immutability and superiority of the country’s liberal principles” (964). Walt (2011) explains that declarations of American exceptionalism rest on the belief that the United States is a “uniquely virtuous nation, one that loves peace, nurtures liberty, respects human rights, and embraces the rule of law” (2). The frame also suggests that the United States has a solemn duty to maintain its international primacy for the benefit of the world. Monten (2008) also argues that the US is motivated by a sense of duty, honor and integrity to fulfill its role as an “agent of historical transformation and liberal change in the international system” (113). After 9/11 attacks, Western media revived the belief in the ‘shining city upon hill’ and the U.S. administration proclaimed that it has a divinely ordained mission to lead the rest of the world in its war against terrorism.

The structuring of America as a unique and superior nation by the media was intended to serve the purposes of the ‘War on Terror’. Media elites offered “justification of military action on the promise of ‘democracy and of the model the U.S.’ provided for such reform” (Rojecki, 2008, 77). Thomas Friedman (2001) of the *New York Times* notes that: “Many in this part of the world crave the best of America, and we cannot forget that we are their ray of hope” (67). Michael Ignatiff (2003) also remarks in the *New York Times* that America’s empire is not like the empires of times past, the 21st century imperium is characterized with “political sciences... free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome Military power the world has ever known” (paragraph 5). Kagan (2002) wrote that the United States is a “liberal, progressive society through and through, and to the extent that Americans believe in power, they believe it must be a means of advancing the principles of a liberal civilization and a liberal world order” (6). Krauthammer (2002) argues that this liberal world would enable America to “extend the peace by advancing democracy and can preserve the peace by acting as balancer of last resort” (15). Mainstream media has repeatedly framed America’s assumed obligation to concern itself with the well-being of global humanity. Ironically, these proclamations were not fully translated during the invasion on Iraq.

As the following analysis shows, *Generation Kill* criticizes the recurrent discursive frame of Muslims' innate tendency to terrorism by demonstrating the soldiers' extreme violence and tyranny during their deployment in Iraq. This frame is also challenged by humanizing Iraqis and voicing their anguishes and misfortunes due to the invasion. In addition to this, *Generation Kill* challenges the frame of American exceptionalism by demonstrating America's interest in Iraq's natural resources and unmasking the imperial intentions of the United States in Iraq. Moreover, it unravels the degrading human violations of Iraqi civilians which dismantle America's alleged claims of protecting human rights and dignity.

Literature Review

In *Generation Kill* Wright reported his experiences as an embedded reporter with the 1ST Reconnaissance Battalion of the United States Marine Corps, during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The book was originally published as a three-part article in Rolling Stone. For the first of the three-part series, Wright was awarded the National Magazine Award for Excellence in Reporting. *Generation Kill* was then adapted into a mini-series aired on US television channel HBO in 2008 which gave the book further attention. The author's assignment lasted two months in which he gave descriptions of the field of combat, day-to-day experiences, the soldiers' reactions and attitudes, and their fears and insecurities. While Wright encountered different members of the battalion from all ranks, the most prominently-featured were: Sergeant Brad Colbert, Lance Corporal Harold James Trombley, Sergeant Rudy, First Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick, Sergeant Antonio Espera, and Corporal Josh Ray Person. Wright attempted to report what he saw and what he witnessed of soldiers' behaviors and attitudes in the war zone. While the prologue starts in the first person perspective, the writer's presence is never dominant. Although he attempted to unravel America's geopolitical role in Iraq, he was particularly interested in depicting the controversial psychology of the modern soldier without passing judgements or accusations.

Lisa Kessel (2014) notes that Wright makes sure not to portray the Marines as either heroes or villains. He does not glamorize the Marines or the situation they are in. She explains that Wright gives a realistic view of the Marines and the way they deal with death and post-traumatic stress (23). She adds that "*Generation Kill* does not put the Marines down as villains... they do care about what they are doing there. They do not mind shooting Fedayeen, but shooting civilians can break them up" (23). The study, however, argues that despite exposing varying opinions on the issue of killing civilians, the majority of soldiers do not differentiate between Fedayeen and civilians. Moreover, they exhibited severe violence and uncontrollable lust for killing. Thomas Bjerre (2011) explains that this thrive for killing is due to the fact that the children from the so-called 'Generation Kill' have grown up in a historical vacuum (9). The 18- to 10-year-old soldiers fighting in Afghanistan or Iraq were born after the fall of the Berlin Wall. To them the Cold War is an ancient history. He adds that "their lives have not been shaped by noble ideologies worth sacrificing their lives for" (9). This paper argues that soldiers were so delusional that they viewed the war zone as a video game in which they saw themselves as heroes and fighters for freedom. While in reality, they were bunch of bloodthirsty youngsters who get adrenaline-rush when they kill innocent people and torture them. Although Wright presented veterans as tough, reliable and hard core, he depicted their insensitivity, cruelty and barbarity. Wright's reminiscence of the war experience defies media frame of Muslims' leaning on violence and barbarism. Instead, it depicts shocking realities of the soldiers' unjustified thrust for murder and extremism.

Wright critiques the veterans in their handling of the war and highlights their innate tendency of killing and torturing Iraqis. He observes that soldiers follow an unspoken code of "getting some" which is an unofficial cheer used by veterans to kill more and get some excitement in doing so. He notes how exhilarating it is for them to use their guns and blow things up. They constantly boast about their might and

grandeur. Wright remarks that these young men “represent what is more or less America’s first generation of disposable children ... Many are on more intimate terms with video games, reality TV shows and Internet porn than they are with their own parents” (19). Cynthia Fuchs (2008) notes that “Wright’s characters seek models in Pop culture, in superheroes, killers and cowboys.... They are most of the time vulgar, confused, and hostile” (paragraph 4). Wright shows that the veterans’ instinct and appetite for killing was so intense that they could not distinguish between insurgents and innocent civilians. When Doc Brayan (a doctor employed with the Battalion) approaches, the women unfurl the bundle they’ve been dragging across the berms, he found four small holes on each side of a 12- year old boy. He observes that this kid’s been zipped with five-five-six rounds!” (170). Doc Brayan shouts, referring to a caliber of bullet commonly used in American weapons. He declares angrily: “Marines shot this boy! ... These jack asses” (170). The acknowledgment of the soldiers’ cruelty fragments the frame of Muslims’ wickedness. Moreover, it sheds light on the atrocity of insensitive soldiers who kill young Iraqi kids with no remorse or guilt.

Wright provides readers with insightful images that expose Iraqis’ misery and mistreatment. He refers to an old woman whose grandsons were by the road when the marines’ Humvees scared the camels. He reports that “the boys ran out after then and were shot by the marines” (171). Kids, women, old men were all targeted with no obvious reason but the soldiers’ uncontrolled lust for blood. After shooting the kid, Firrando (a lieutenant in the Platoon) refuses the request for the kid to be medevacked and says: “We can afford to fly predators, but we can’t take care of this kid” (172). This intended negligence is not surprising due to the fact the Army never looks back to all the injuries and misfortunes it leaves behind. Unfortunately, due to the deliberate inattention of these harsh realities by the media, the American public was ill –informed until these realities became visible and noticeable.

Whereas mainstream media falsely exaggerated Muslims’ tyranny, *Generation Kill* showed how American soldiers turned the war zone into an arena for exhibiting their uncontrollable thrust for murder in the name of freedom. The One marine says: “That was ...Iraqi freedom...shoot anything that moves from your window...That’s what I call freedom” (346). The novel is filled with disgusting images of torture and excessive violence against Iraqis. Wright comments after witnessing an attack by American soldiers on civilians: “The scene was so disgusting that some of the smoking wreckage “emits the odor of barbecuing chicken- the smell of slow-roasting human corpses inside” (309). Soldiers shockingly exercised terror and violence to the limit that Wright wondered if soldiers should be called “heroes or baby killers” (176). He adds that the only way not be labelled as baby killers is that they “shouldn’t have got caught” (176). American soldiers exhibited demonic lust for torturing Iraqis. Ironically, such soldiers were given bronze and silver stars for their heroic deeds in Iraq as portrayed in mainstream media. One of the veteran’s remarks: “What we should do is to paint skulls on our faces. Come into these towns like demons. These are primitive people we would scare the shit out of them” (196). Wright shows that the American soldiers were monsters and their actions were primitive and sadistic. The soldier continues: “What we ought to do is to send everyone off to Ace Hardware, get some chain saws, capture some Iraqis, cut their limbs off, tie them to wheelchairs, load them in a c-130 and drop them on Baghdad. We’ll just sit back in our Humvees reading playboy” (196). This insensitivity was crystal clear that Troy Patterson (2008) describes the veterans in Iraq as “psychopaths, a majority of experience xenophobes. All are bellicose (by definition) and bloodthirsty (by necessity)” (paragraph 3). This inhumane treatment shows that the “United States, and other Western powers often apply double standards with regards to human rights enforcement” (Saghaye-Biria, 2018, 60). Iraqis were deprived from basic human rights. They were degraded, insulted and dehumanized deliberately by American Troops during the invasion.

Despite the medias’ intended effort to convince the public and the young recruits that America is fighting a monstrous enemy, *Generation Kill* expresses the soldiers’ doubt of these proclamations. Dr.

Brayan bitterly comments: “We shot their kids” and he ironically remarks: “I bet they are grateful to be liberated” (172). The oft-celebrated mission of liberating Iraqis has turned into a bloodshed and chaos. A soldier wonders: “Do you realize the shit we’ve done here; the people we’ve killed?” He continues: “Back home in the civilian world, if we did this, we would go to prison” (277). Wright acknowledges the fact that the battlefield exposed unjustifiable lust for murder by soldiers who felt freed from the strains of ethical codes of behavior. The battlefield provided soldiers with an arena to exercise their innate desire for killing. They were no longer forbidden to delve into their sadistic tendencies and act in a barbaric manner. When Wright witnessed the harsh treatment of civilians, he wondered if the people at home are going to “see this - all these women and children we’re killing? No!” (197). He realizes that this war has annihilated Iraq and destroyed it. Western media tried to conceal the horrific murders of civilians, but some veterans were haunted by the horrific images of unjustified death. Sergeant Damon Fawcett remarks: “when I get home people will probably ask me to speak at high schools about this. I don’t know how I’m going to explain all the dead women and children I’ve seen; the things we’ve done here” (222). These ethical considerations have been questioned by Wright whose novel explores the encounters between American soldiers and innocent Iraqi civilians in a hybrid space, a kind of space that allows the Western audience to view Muslims with fresh eyes and rethink the relationship between Islam and the West.

Wright notes how ambivalent this war is. He bitterly acknowledges that war is “either glamorized- like we kick their ass- or the opposite- look how horrible, we kill these civilians” (219). This ambivalence is a natural byproduct of the media’s intended framing of Muslims as predators. Ambivalence and deception were common traits of America’s foreign policy. Wright refers back to the first Gulf War in which George Bush gave the Iraqis the approval to use force against the uprising of some rebels. At the same time, the U.S. military prepared to battle the Iraqis in Kuwait, so he acknowledges that: “It’s not the first time the citizens of Nasiriya have been screwed by the Americans” (112). The past humiliations of Iraqis were continued during the 2003 invasion by soldiers who were obsessed with fighting Muslims. They were unwilling to differentiate between insurgents and innocent civilians. Killing civilians cold-bloodedly shows that “lost in these calculations is Iraq, which is viewed not as a large complex and multifarious society but as helpless back water tract to be shaded by American might” (Spencer, 2006, 59). Soldiers excel in torturing civilians and dehumanizing them. They are driven by Islamophobic rhetoric that has been exploited to orchestrate fear of Muslims and to provide justifications of annihilating them. A rhetoric believes that certain people deserve to be manipulated due to their assumed inherent inferiority. Wright, however, elevates the status of Iraqis and humanizes them despite the deliberate racial profiling of mainstream media.

The will of recognizing the “other” holds the potential or possibility of recognizing persons or groups who are distinctively different. Wright recognizes the human aspect of Iraqis and shows empathy for their suffering. He remarks that “most of the Iraqis have ordinary pictures of families-children-wives-parents” (96). He describes the surrendered soldiers as “wretched, don’t have shoes and have swollen, bleeding feet” (95). He adds: “I didn’t expect how beaten down they’d be” (96). By incorporating humane images of Iraqis, fiction writers provide a “perspective on reality that is at odds with that contained within most Western media frames” (O’Gorman, 2015, 26). Wright alludes to Iraqi figures and portrays their normality and humanity. Staff Sergeant Brad "Iceman" Colbert surprisingly admires a “teenage boy and girl” who “walk ahead on the trail... holding hands...kind of cute” (67). Sergeant Antonio "Poke" Espera, also, expresses his feelings toward Iraqis: “before we crossed into Iraq, I fucking hated Arabs. I don’t know why but as soon as we got here, it’s just gone. I just feel sorry for them. I miss my little girl. I don’t want to kill nobody’s children” (110). Espera’s sincere remarks break away from “romanticized” views of the war on Iraq. Among these romanticized views of war is the celebration of American exceptionalism frame which assumes that the invasion of Iraq was conducted to promote democracy and to protect the human rights of

Iraqis and not to acquire any materialistic gains. *Generation Kill*, however, provides its readers with different revelations about the true intensions of this war.

The novel deflates the frame of American exceptionalism by explicitly pinpointing the materialistic hegemonic purposes of the war on Iraq. Doc Bryan remarks: “this is a very cognizant way of explaining what we are all doing here, we’re going to be fighting a war for oil” (25). False pretenses of setting a role model to the world were deconstructed. The veterans joined the Army for many different reasons, mainly hegemony and economic gains. Patterson admits: “I am not going to pretend I’m this great American savior in Iraq. We didn’t come here to liberate; we came to look out for our interests” (94). He admits that “the protestors have a lot of valid points. War sucks” (94). The war on Iraq was an exercise in the expansion of the American empire and reign. Spencer (2006) argues that the war on Iraq has made starkly visible an “imperialists project that has not been drawing to a close” (52), but on the contrary, it has been “expanding American hegemony, extending corporate power and hijacking internal institutions of governance” (52). While mainstream media ignored the imperial motives of the invasion, Wright examined America’s motives for the thrusting itself into this war.

Espera is one of the most daring veterans who acknowledges the imperial intensions of the invasion. He compares the situation in Iraq with what happened to the Red Indians. He bitterly acknowledges the role of Western media in hiding the truth behind America’s hegemonic motives. He sadly says: “Dog, before we came over here, I watched Pocahontas with my eight-year-old daughter, Disney has taken my heritage as an American Indian and fucked it up with this typical American white-boy formula” (193). This historical white-boy formula gave Americans the right to invade foreign countries and to occupy them under the disguise of spreading modernity and civilization. He continues: “Pocahontas is another case of your people shitting on mine”, the true story of Pocahontas is that “White boys come to the new land, kill ninety percent of the men and rape all the women” (193). This comparison makes striking similarities between the situation in Iraq and the historical abuses of America. Monica Michelin (2016) argues that despite the fact that the novel espouses the embedded “Marine perspective”, it presents a dialogical critique of the massive carnage of civilians, the psychopathic bloodlust for some young recruits, and imperialism’ (2). Espera is a prominent character in the novel whose dialogues with Wright reveal the “actual rationale for war” (2). The rationale of spreading America’s hegemony and control worldwide. Espera unfolds what lies behind the glamorous spectacle of this war. He remarks that ‘all countries are obliged to play a role as a servant in the white man’s empire.... pride, cynicism and self-loathing Hell, the U.S. did it at home for two hundred years - killed Indians - used slaves exploited immigrant labor to build a system? they can’t mask the sheer brutality of the situation’ (232). He adds that the U.S. just “go into all these countries, here and in Africa, and set up an American government and infrastructure with McDonald’s, Starbucks - MTV’ (230). The spread of America’s iconic brands highlight America’s intension in establishing its economic power and influence in all corners of the world. This tendency is accompanied with imperial intensions to control the less advanced countries economically and politically.

Fostering hegemony and reasserting American dominance were the real motives behind this invasion. Mainstream and popular media attempted to conceal these purposes under the talk of freedom, democracy and human rights. This talk, as Spencer (2006) argues is merely a ‘smokescreen set up to conceal more unseemly motivations, but this missionary is set out further the special interests of American elites’ (57). Wright shows that the talk of freedom and emancipation was ridiculed by Iraqi citizens who knew with no doubt why the Americans invaded Iraq. A passing woman asks a marine: “‘Why did you American come here?’, ‘We want to help you ma’am,’ he responded. Manal says referring to Baghdad: ‘I love my city very much ...you are bombing it and it will be worse’. The marine asked her: “‘Why do you think we came here?’ Manal responded with no hesitation: ‘Our country is very rich’” (273). The reality that the invasion

on Iraq is carried out due to Iraq's wealth was pronounced clearly by Robert Ebel, coordinator of the US state departments pre-war planning for Iraq oil, who asked: "What did Iraq have that we would like to have? It wasn't the sand!" (16 September 2009 interview, cited in Muttitt, 2018, 42). With no doubt, Oil was the real objective that originally drew the American to Iraq. Knox (2013) argues that the 'War on Terror' "rationalizes imperialist violence and this humanitarian intervention has been understood as 'a doctrine' enabling the U.S. to legitimate its interventions into peripheral territories" (115, 117). This doctrine was sincerely portrayed in the last scene of Wright's novel. When Espera was praised by the rich and the wealthy after returning home for Iraq, he rose to his feet saying: "I'm not a hero. To maintain this way of life in a fine community like this, you need psychos like us to go out and drop a bomb on somebody's house" (353).

The conclusion

Simon Cottle (2006) notes that journalists post- 9/11 and the reporting of the global war on terror clearly "reproduce agendas and representations that support state interests and policies" (191). It was part of the state interests to wage the 'War on Terror' and to accumulate nations to support it and actively participate in it. This paper, however, shows that fiction, as a tool of dismantling reality and questioning it, critiques media discourses that assisted the Bush's administration in starting out this war. Moreover, this paper show that media failed to acknowledge the intentional pervasiveness of violence and racism against Iraqis. In its close reading of *Generation Kill*, the paper concludes that the Iraqis have been treated inhumanly and unfairly by the American troops. Therefore, to challenge the frame of Muslims' savagery, barbarity and their categorization as terrorist "other", Wright unravels the U.S. military lust for blood under the guise of being fair. He exposes their excitement and thrill after killing civilians. Another means by which Wright deflate the frame of Muslims' innate desire to terrorism is by voicing the Iraqi's suffering and misery. He humanizes Iraqis and shows that they used to live normal lives with normal dreams before the invasion. Despite the fact the Wright does not deny the existence of violent Iraqi insurgents, he acknowledges that not all Iraqis are violent and terrorists.

In addition to this, to deflate the frame of America's Exceptionalism, Wright reveals the imperial purposes that triggered the 'War on Terror'. *Generation Kill* exposes the hegemonic motives behind the invasion on Iraq. Also, it pinpoints the clear-cut imperial intensions of the invasion that were hidden in Western media and were replaced by discursive American exceptional values. Wright's narrative expressed a dialectical consciousness of the war and its atrocities against civilians. The paper concludes with revealing drastic violations of human rights in Iraq in which Wright expresses the humiliation and degradation of civilians to debunk the oft-celebrated values of liberty, freedom and human rights. It can be concluded that media is a double-edged weapon that either facilitate informed dialogue and debate, or increase polarization. Nader notes the Western media must break with stereotypes of Arabs and Islam. Furthermore, ideological and political conflict between the Western and the Eastern/Arab world is one of the most significant phenomena of the present era and the struggle is mediated, reproduced, and circulated by the media.

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