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The Veterans' Lethal Memory of Battle: The Turmoil of Moral Injury

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The Veterans' Lethal Memory of Battle

The Turmoil of Moral Injury

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Master's Thesis / MALS program

Introduction:

The definition of moral injury suggests that the majority of soldiers or Marines who were a part of the Iraq or Afghanistan wars were either oblivious or negligent to the ugly truths of war. Professor Brett Litz defines the term as: "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (1). Even though they were being trained and taught to fight for peace and freedom, the soldiers who happen to possess good conscience and character are doomed and terribly shaken by the ethical transgressions they had to make to survive. The weight of war is represented by the act of killing, which entails inflicting harm on innocent civilians, enemy soldiers or comrades. This harm that soldiers execute causes a subsequent psychological problem for these veterans who return home broken-hearted and guilt-stricken without any clear manifestations of such overwhelming agony. The returning veterans suffer a hidden psychological, moral and emotional crisis that is hard to detect through their body language or their emotional and social presence.

In the context of war, the term 'moral injury' is an existential wound that the veterans suffer from and changes who they are. The soldiers' exposure to various traumatic encounters during combat trigger a dramatic alteration of character and beliefs, engendering an apprehension of the war's true moral value which drains their physical and psychological endurance and leaves them emotionally wrecked. These encounters include bombing places that are inhabited by civilians: women, children and the elderly. Being responsible for the death of their comrades, carrying their corpses, or leaving them behind on the battlefield to be forgotten or buried in ashes magnifies the soldiers' guilt,

escalates the degree of trauma and creates a deep moral wound that lingers in their reality to torment and scar them.

When the soldiers' training dictates that they are destined to become heroes if they choose to honor the patriotic codes of national loyalty, their spirit will be charged with an overwhelming desire to conquer other countries in their pursuit of public recognition. However, the soldiers' practical encounters in the battlefield wreck all expectations and limit their ability to fathom the reasons behind the military's manipulative endeavors and its attempt to distort the reality of war. This tactical and moral distortion of the actuality of war creates the soldiers' traumatic memory of combat which in turn generates their hidden wounds. Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini examine the impact of moral trauma on war veterans and report that after the Iraq war, "Veterans' suicides average one every eighty minutes, an unprecedented eighteen a day or six thousand a year" (12). Most veterans who return home after war grapple with a profound psychological and moral crisis which hinders their ability to understand their emotions. These veterans also become antisocial and begin to feel that society is a threatening entity, so they choose solitude over social adjustment which leads many to commit suicide as a solution for their unresolvable agony.

In order to understand the dimensions or the depths of the term 'moral injury,' it is necessary to shed light on how soldiers under Marine Corps training perceive war and what the impact of this training is in creating the "warrior's psyche." Further, we may ask, does the military provide the soldiers with adequate emotional or psychological preparation prior to the time of combat? What is the impact of failing to instruct the

soldiers of the truths of war? How does the soldiers' emotional disintegration lead to their

ethical disturbances and transform them into "tools of murder?"

In the context of war, it is crucial to highlight the elements of 'moral injury' and

its distinctiveness from PTSD. Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay argues that moral injury exists

upon the condition of "a betrayal of what's right; either by a person in legitimate authority

or by one's self- 'I did it'- in a high stakes condition" (182). In order to understand the

damaging psychological dimensions of moral injury, it will be necessary to shed light on

the profound sense of betrayal which evolves because of the soldiers' moral wound and

occurs due to the severe encounter with war's truth and its atrocities. The soldiers are

morally wounded because they underwent an emotional and ethical violation of their

deepest beliefs and convictions. My essay sheds light on the causes of the soldiers' sense

of having been misled and its impact on their altered perception of war. Due to the

soldiers' profound deceit either from the government or their military leaders who were

unwilling to enlighten them of the war's horrendous circumstances, the soldiers develop

another feeling of victimization that magnifies the previous one and leads them to doubt

the real purpose behind their military mission and their commanders' ethical aims. In

addition, the soldiers' increasing distrust drives them to question their country's

misleading calls for loyalty and patriotism.

This research also seeks to examine the individual, social and psychological

damage that is caused by 'moral injury' which left millions of veterans and their families

overburdened with shame and a never-ending cycle of guilt. After the war, the soldiers'

'moral injury' is concomitant with blistering guilt which might lead to suicide. The guilt is

a traumatic reaction, associated with the rise of violence, especially killing, that occurs at the time of war and with the soldiers' violation of their moral responsibility towards their fellow comrades and innocent civilians. The moral injury causes an unconscious guilt that develops after years of combat due to their traumatic memory of killing which starts to haunt them and cripples their ability to express their remorse over what they did. The veterans feel the magnitude of the offenses and violations they performed against their moral beliefs at the expense of innocent unarmed men, women and children. They also feel tremendously responsible for those crimes in the name of patriotic assumptions which leads to their unceasing penitence. Brett Litz and Shira Maguen also highlight the correlation between the action of killing and the rise of guilt when they argue that, "killing of women and children- arguably morally injurious events- may be associated with guilt feelings" (2). In other words, the occurrence of the action of killing against these two specific categories elevates the possibility of the soldiers' psychological wounding, which contributes in escalating their sense of guilt. In this essay, the notion of killing or being killed and its emotional and ethical repercussions on the soldiers is an inevitable result of war, which leaves combatants saddled with guilt, shame and an intolerable loss of self. The essay also tackles the dire impact of these overwhelming emotions on the soldiers' mental stability and their gradual ethical decline that leads them to choose the voluntary death: suicide.

My essay will also underline the intervention methods that clinicians use to help these veterans overcome their ethical dilemma and begin their recovery journey. In the battlefield, soldiers face inevitable ethical challenges. They are also forced to make some

life-changing decisions that shake their core moral values. After the war, the morally excruciating guilt, shame, grief, and remorse continue to haunt these veterans. These emotions contribute to escalating the profundity of their psychological trauma which in turn increases the severity of these veterans' anxiety levels. Regardless of the war's recurrent themes of death, loss of self or the haunting memories of battle, I envision the possibility of these veterans' psychological repair and hope to illuminate the ways through which a full recovery can see the light. Returning veterans grappled with an unseen moral trauma that challenged their principled beliefs and resulted in a profound psychological crisis. Due to the bitterness of warfare, the soldiers suffer a moral trauma that leads to their psychological and ethical plight which elevates their sense of betrayal and limits their ability to reconnect with reality.

The Components of Moral Injury:

The main elements of moral injury that Jonathan Shay recently addressed provide an even sharper frame for its definition. Given the limited knowledge and research that is being conducted for the concept of moral injury and its prevalence in returning veterans, it is vital to introduce Shay's argument in which he explains its primary ingredients. He suggests that moral injury consists of a violation of a moral belief by an authority figure or by the soldiers themselves when encountering a life-threatening situation (182). In order to understand the profundity of the term 'moral injury,' one should first understand the word 'betrayal' which carries in its layers bitter meanings of corruption, violation of trust and disloyalty. Unfortunately, the authoritarian commanders or the soldiers

themselves perform these immoral actions once faced by a challenging situation in the field of combat.

When a commander or a fellow soldier violates the soldiers' trust, this results in a debilitating outcome that manifests itself in the soldiers' broken spirit and unceasing emotional distress. A chaplain named Herm, who had to serve as a religious guide in the Iraq war, witnessed the anguish and the interior battle that most deployed soldiers suffer from between their moral and military obligations towards their country, comrades, and their utter doubt of the war's justice or valid purposes. Brock and Lettini assert that, "Herm personally experienced and witnessed in others the crisis of conscience that led soldiers, whether volunteers or conscripts, to solidify their commitments not to fight in an immoral war. Yet, they had to serve. The cost to their moral consciences was tremendous" (26). Due to the restricting nature of military service, the fear of imprisonment, and the public condemnation or the accusation of treason, American combatants feel compelled to fight and adapt to never-ending guilt and shame that keeps haunting their present lives and disrupts their ability to adjust to civilian society.

The complex moral issue of trust limits their capacity to trust themselves, to trust that society is a safe surrounding for reinventing their lost identities or to trust that others can be the refuge from any expected harm. These instances of doubt become a psychological and social burden that inhibits their understanding of the moral crisis they are going through. This doubt marks them and leaves them morally and socially wrecked and feeling inadequate. Tyler Boudreau, an infantry captain in the Marine Corps states that, "Moral injury is about the damage done to our moral fiber when transgressions occur

by our hands, through our orders, or with our connivance. When we accept these

transgressions, however pragmatically (for survival, for instance), we sacrifice a piece of

our moral integrity. That's what moral injury is all about" (749). In addressing these

individual, social and psychological precipitants of moral injury, it is also essential to

draw the distinction between PTSD and moral injury to create the understanding that

moral injury is a deeper form of the moral and psychological anguish that PTSD

provokes, yet they are distinct in nature and the sensations that they both generate.

***The Distinction between PTSD and Moral Injury*:**

Shay hypothesizes that PTSD is a shallow, exterior wound that does not have an

existential, altering impact upon the soldiers' emotional or psychological status. On the

other hand, a moral injury is a subsequent repercussion of PTSD and a profound form of

psychological turmoil that can transform the soldiers' characters, attitudes and

perceptions. In an interview conducted by Jeff Guntzel, Dr. Shay supports his theory as

follows, "Post-traumatic stress disorder is the primary injury, the 'uncomplicated injury'.

Moral injury is the infection; it's the hemorrhaging" (2010). Moreover, moral injury alters

the soldiers' connection with self, others and with society. Psychologists Brett Litz and

Shira Maguen highlight this difference, "Whereas PTSD is a mental disorder that requires

a diagnosis, moral injury is a dimensional problem" (1). While PTSD can be

physiologically detected, this statement assures that moral injury differs in its extent and

depth from PTSD and its symptoms can be clinically hard to locate.

Despite the attention to draw the distinction between PTSD and moral injury, it is also essential to do so while highlighting the physical manifestations of both. Brett Litz articulates that despite the similar physical manifestations that PTSD and moral injury share, there are critical differences that cannot be underestimated or ignored. The veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD can experience feelings of intrusions, avoidance and numbing, whereas the morally injured veterans experience other exceptional issues like shame, guilt, demoralization, self-handicapping behaviors, and self-harm (1). Shay continues to underline the distinction and suggests that PTSD-like symptoms can also include fear, horror and helplessness, while the morally injured are deeply scarred and engulfed in a mayhem of anger, guilt and shame (Shay 185). However, the mute danger and devastation that moral injury can inflict is hidden within their souls, is more complex and requires careful consideration, professional knowledge and a deeper understanding of the soldiers' internal anguish.

Allan Young's discussion of the traumatic memory as a "kind of pathogenic secret" (28) is mesmerizing, yet controversial due to the reluctance of admitting to the actual existence of the individuals' moral wound or conceptualizing it. He theorizes that PTSD is "an act of concealment . . . secrets of this sort are causes of moral suffering, as well as sickness" (Young 28). In other words, and due to the non-existence of the term at the time, Young argues that PTSD is a type of psychiatric disease that is wrapped in secrecy from one's self and from others and evokes moral agony. Particularly, PTSD is an internalized, unconscious affliction that causes moral injury. However, Young's argument of the other type of concealment succeeds in highlighting the type of moral injury that

this research seeks to address and shows how it is distinct from PTSD in terms of

behavioral consciousness and self-awareness. Young argues that "The second kind of

concealment involves a memory that the owner is hiding from himself. He knows that he

has a secret memory because he senses its existence, but he is unable to retrieve it . . . he

does not remember that he has forgotten and has to learn about his memory from

someone else, typically a therapist" (29). Even though moral injury was not yet

conceptualized or identifiable as a disorder, Young is keen to administer the differences

between both acts of concealment in terms of the extent of awareness. The PTSD-stricken

veterans are incognizant of their mental deterioration and unwary of its symptoms or

dangers, while the morally injured individuals are aware of their traumatic, hidden

memory because they can feel the intensity of their trauma and the painful, radical

change in their character and attitude towards themselves, others and society. Therefore,

the veterans are unable to undo such damage or repair their fragmented souls unless a

clinician emphasizes or treats it.

In another startling distinction that Dr. Shay draws between PTSD and moral

injury, he argues that "Pure PTSD, as officially defined, with no complications such as

substance abuse or danger-seeking, is rarely what wrecks veterans' lives, crushes them to

suicide, or promotes domestic or criminal violence. Moral injury . . . does" (184). In

terms of the damage that both terms can bring upon a veteran's life, Shay asserts that

moral injury creates this depleting impact on the returning veterans more than PTSD;

moreover, it has the capacity to shatter the veterans' lives, impair their characters and

judgements and disrupt their mental and emotional stability which will lead them to

choose suicide, or guide them towards all kinds of violence (Shay 184). He also articulates that PTSD, as a mental disorder, along with its varied unsettling repercussions does not have the capability to destroy a veteran's life like that of moral injury.

Despite the above distinction which attempts to alleviate the damage that the disorder of PTSD inflicts, it is crucial to remember that the veterans who return home and grapple with it have lost the sense of safety and security that they are supposed to feel while at home. The veterans feel constantly threatened and unprotected either by family members, friends or society. As a result, the morally injured veterans keep wrestling with an opaque kind of affront that causes a disintegration of trust in themselves, others and the society. They begin to perceive themselves as perpetrators who stripped others of their humanity; moreover, they lose faith in themselves as defenders of justice, feel unreliable and continue to see others as accomplices in crime instead of symbols of reliable support or sources of compassion and understanding.

Brock and Lettini continue to sketch the distinct nature of PTSD and moral injury, asserting that both are separate experiences. They argue that "Moral injury is not PTSD. Many books on veterans' healing confuse and conflate them into one thing . . . The difference between them is partly physical" (3). This statement negates the conceptual similarity between both terms and affirms that the distinction between them is not only physical or clinical but also spiritual and psychological. The latter aspects require further attention and recognition from health care professionals who are still unfamiliar with the extent of moral trauma these veterans grapple with after battle.

Litz and Maguen also draw an analogy which concludes that some veterans who are medically diagnosed with PTSD perceive themselves as victims of war. Meanwhile, those veterans who are going through a morally injurious phase see themselves as being victimizers. They say, "Being the target of killing or injuring in war was associated with PTSD and being the agent of killing or failing to prevent death or injury was associated with general psychological distress and suicide attempts" (2). This distinction in diagnosis between PTSD-stricken veterans and the morally injured depended on who were the instruments of killing and who were the objects. The elevation of suicide rates among returning veterans stems from their persistent conviction that their individual decisions of tormenting or killing others caused pain to other innocent civilians. Therefore, they are directly responsible for impairing the lives of others and depriving them of their family members. So, the PTSD-stricken veterans are traumatized because they have been the prey of war while the morally injured veterans were the hunters and predators. Because of the psychological turmoil and moral crisis which the returning veterans contend with, they have been the primary tools in inflicting harm on others. The morally injured do not perceive themselves as victims but as perpetrators.

***The Soldiers' Cultural and Ethical Perception of War*:**

Due to the limited financial opportunities that society offers soldiers, they feel trapped and are highly driven to join the military to secure a living and at the same time serve their country. Soldiers do not regard fighting in war as a chance to achieve success because they find themselves compelled to choose this path when all else seems unattainable and the choices of life sustainability are on edge. Brock and Lettini argue,

"The opportunity to fight in war is not a reason many men and women join the military . . . If our society provided a living wage in any job, affordable housing, free universal health care, and high - quality education through college, to is not clear how many young people would still volunteer for military service" (98). If a young man or woman is offered better work or education opportunities to enhance or improve their social and financial status, they probably would not seek the alternative of joining the military. However, this statement carries a serious indictment to the American society which is incapable of addressing the various and basic demands of its young men and women who deserve to have decent jobs that can secure a decent living. As being previously stated by Brock and Lettini, the soldiers' choice of joining the military service is driven by the lack of alternatives and their pursuit of a better financial and social status among their family members and in their society (98), which means that soldiers' incentives to fight in war are not morally driven. While in military training, the soldiers develop their moral conscience and develop the misleading moral demeanor which makes the theory of war complex and problematic.

The soldiers' perception of the war as an instrument for peace, justice, and liberation creates the necessity to embrace the "mythology of the warrior" which shapes their beliefs of loyalty and patriotism to one's country. Brock and Lettini explain that, "[The soldier feels proud] to become part of a long line of chivalrous warriors ready to sacrifice his life for God, his country, and his comrades" (19). In other words, the soldiers' sense of self-pride is established based on their belief that they will fight for a noble cause; moreover, in renouncing their life to fight for their country, they will become

unforgettable symbols of courage, loyalty, and patriotism. Most of war veterans, however, perceive the lore of this mythology as misleading and it attempts to eclipse the true horrors of war. The Marines are trained to believe that war is an honorable way to prove their loyalty to their country and express their deep patriotism. In instilling such forceful perceptions, the soldiers' military aspirations of glory are magnified and further enhanced by a deep sense of morality which includes honoring their country, their families and their comrades. Brock and Lettini continue to highlight the poignant effect of the Marine Corps training upon soldiers, "What ultimately enables a Marine to ignore the ethical limits normally placed on the use of violence-to kill and to die in battle- is not abstract ideology, but a personal code of honor, self-respect, loyalty, and accountability to one's comrades" (19). In other words, the Marines disregard of the ethical limits in the field of combat and their desensitization to killing others with no mercy is argued not to be a pre-determined set of beliefs on the part of the soldiers. Instead, it is a willing and mechanical performance that they need to execute to preserve their position in the military and to prove their non-negotiable camaraderie and devotion to their country.

The soldiers' apathy and willful acts of killing invites one to contemplate how the military perceives ethics in war since they limit the moral standards within the use of violence and urge soldiers to preserve the code of honor while killing innocent civilians. Also, how do soldiers perceive honor and killing as concomitant terms? Tyler Boudreau, an Iraq veteran, does not perceive war as a means to achieve this long-awaited honor. He avers, "They say war is hell, but I say it's the foyer to hell" (Brock 65). Another Iraq veteran supports Boudreau's portrayal of the war:

> I have learned from firsthand experience that war is the destroyer of everything
>
> that is good in the world; it turns our young into soulless killers, and we tell them
>
> that they are heroes when they master the 'art' of killing. That is a very
>
> deranged mindset in my opinion. It destroys the environment, life, and the
>
> resources that could be used to create more life by advancing our endeavors.
>
> (Brock 38)

While the achievement of honor was a blurry outcome of the soldiers' ongoing fight for

the illusion of freedom, killing and being killed is a bitter fact and a dire consequence of

war. The Marines are trained to believe that to achieve such honor, they should learn how

to kill without feeling any kind of remorse. The military perceives the technique of killing

as thoughtless and educates its soldiers that it should be devoid of any sense of ethical

weight because it is an inevitable fact and is a means for survival. Brock discusses this

technique which is called "reflexive fire training" in that, "soldiers were conditioned to

shoot before thinking" (18). One can imagine how the military perceives Marines as

instruments for killing, rather than human beings who need guidance, guardianship and

protection. In military training, commanders forget that soldiers possess a mental and

emotional repertoire that deserves to be valued rather than abused.

Joanna Bourke reiterates this notion of the combatant's individual memory of

killing and how it contradicts with his pre-existing beliefs of war. She indicates that "For

[soldiers], combat was 'not war, but murder' their memory of killing did not match their

pre-held scripts of what war was 'about'" (478). Strictly speaking, the soldiers' idea of

war was laden with other beliefs or meanings except for murder, which leads one to

question the essence of the combatant's innate belief or definition of war since his practical experiences opposed what he truly believed it was about. One veteran describes the collective memory of war, its painful inscription of shame and its opposition to the combatant's true value of war: "Nothing in the way we are raised admits the possibility of loving war. It is at best a necessary evil, a patriotic duty to be discharged and then put behind us. To love war is to mock the very values we supposedly fight for. It is to be insensitive, reactionary, a brute" (Bourke 478). This veteran echoes the suffering of millions of soldiers whose participation in military service has enabled them to understand the true meaning of war and its malicious endeavors in transforming the soldiers' patriotic mission into deliberate acts of crime which can turn them into beasts. The narrative of war does not only entail the soldiers' projection to be killed but it also ensues the haunting thought of having to kill someone during combat. According to Bourke, the suppression of the combatants' memory of '*having killed'* is improbable. She asserts that, "the individual memory of having killed was relentless in refusing to be repressed" (478). Evidently, the veterans' history of combat generated an un-muted memory of violence which constantly reminds them of the morally injurious acts they directed towards themselves and others. The action of killing, having killed or the anticipation to be killed causes the soldiers' severe anxiety and leads to moral questioning, a disconnection from their individual identity and a sense of loss to their humanity that creates the veterans' journey of self-mourning.

The military's attempt to annihilate the Marines' ability to think of the act of killing as an ethical limitation or as a possible provocation of a societal condemnation

stems from the military's desire to sharpen the soldiers' skills and construct a mentality

that is devoid of empathy towards others. Brock supports the necessity of the soldiers'

absent empathy, "Empathy makes moral conscience possible, and it can undermine the

will to kill" (71). In other words, the soldiers' present empathy leads to a preservation of

moral conscience and ethical considerations at the time of combat that contradicts the

strategic plan of war which is to kill, win and survive. Moreover, the soldiers are not only

trained to kill but they are also expected to initiate the killings in order to achieve the

desired outcome of their unit's survival and their own.

Beyond any doubt, war adds to the soldiers' psychological agony when it

compels them to be responsible for protecting and preserving their comrades' well-being.

Furthermore, if they miscarry their task, they are condemned and disgraced. Brock

continues to support this collective life-sustainability "Personal survival is intertwined

with the survival of the unit. If a soldier fails his duty, he will be responsible for the

deaths of his friends and live with the shame of his failure to save them for the rest of his

life" (70). The soldiers then face a life-long feeling of mortification and dishonor that will

defame them and disparage their self-esteem as fighters and as individuals. Despite the

soldiers' expected, automatic adjustment to killing, while trained and in combat, they are

not truly aware or completely prepared to embrace the true ideology of war; killing, death

and survival. The soldiers' unpreparedness to face these truths of war affect their

psychological status and create the possibility of undergoing a severe moral trauma that

can diminish their apprehension of facts and impair their mental judgment. The extent of

the soldiers' moral trauma is caused by their full immersion within patriotic assumptions

and ideal expectations of triumph against the enemy regardless the spiritual or ethical repercussions that might follow the act of killing. Although the soldiers thought they were going to fight for peace and justice, they were in no way trained for the horrors they would encounter of the reality of war.

The Traumatic Impact of the Lack of Moral Guidance:

In 1987, the military promoted the idea of 'spiritual fitness' for war which re-emerged in 2009, attempting to lessen the impact of war on soldiers through a program called 'A Comprehensive Soldiers Fitness'. This program aimed at shaping and evaluating "the physical, emotional, social, familial and spiritual" health for soldiers. Brock and Lettini discuss the definition of 'spiritual fitness' and argue that it lacks any moral content necessary to build up the soldiers' psychological stamina and fails to instruct them of the ethical responsibilities that they might face at the time of war. They define the spiritually fit as follows:

> Better able to accept the reality of a situation, develop creative coping strategies, find meaning in trauma, maintain an optimistic view of the future, access their social support network, generate the motivation to persevere, grow from adversity, and mitigate serious psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder . . . Individuals who report stronger spiritual motivation also manifest less conflict among other goals in their lives, greater purpose in life, greater commitment to their goals, and more satisfaction and happiness in the pursuit of their strivings. (99)

This statement urges the soldiers to be physically and mentally sound and healthy, and to expect that war is filled with challenging and stressful situations that requires them to be brave, solid and resilient. The military urges the soldiers to accept traumatic experiences like death as a subsequent and inevitable result of war and to cope, move forward and reconcile with its reality. In the military's dictionary, the soldiers' spiritual fitness is crystallized through their agility in understanding danger and embracing moral pain and its consequences with vigor and valor. It is also essential that soldiers develop a strong spiritual incentive to avoid moral conflicts and strive to seek happiness through creating a purpose and a meaningful involvement among other civilians and society. After war, the soldiers are expected to learn the significance of resilience and understand the tenor of their traumatic experiences that might help them to grow. Unfortunately, despite this positive image that the military attempts to carve in the soldiers' minds and souls of the war's possible bright outcome, those traumatic experiences did the opposite. Those conditions created the soldiers' dramatic change of character and caused an enormous deterioration in their moral beliefs.

Despite the spiritual fitness program's endeavors to alleviate the suffering of soldiers prior to combat, the military training fails to provide the soldiers with the necessary psychological or moral guidance and preparation for the possible horrors of war, which contribute to the soldiers' psychological instability. The military's negligence in providing proper guidance regarding what to expect in war results in the soldiers' internal conflict, which leaves them torn between what they believe is right and what their military obligations instruct them to do. This ethical dilemma that soldiers might

face is not properly addressed or drafted as a subject of concern by the military training they receive before or after combat which results in serious psychological turmoil that shakes the soldiers' belief in the credibility or the justice of war.

The lack of psychological and emotional coaching causes a deterioration in the soldiers' ethical assumptions of war, due to their sudden encounters with the ugly truth of death and its antecedent of killing. The shocking revelation that the war's main theme is death places the slogans of patriotism and liberty in the soldiers' memory of the past. The untold truth of war transforms the soldiers' conception of it and extinguishes their patriotic desire to be amongst those knights who believe they are fighting for freedom. Instead, they lose their identity as soldiers and as human beings.

This loss of self or identity and the painful transformation that soldiers suffer is well expressed by a war veteran who wrote a poem entitled "Warrior's Dance" where he describes how war and its bitterness changed who he is:

> I fear I am no longer alien to this horror.
> I am, I am, I am the horror.
> I have lost my humanity
> and have embraced the insanity of war.
> The monster and I are one.
> . . .
> The blood of innocents forever stains my soul!
> The transformation is complete
> And I can never return. (Brock 20)

This declaration illustrates that the veterans became a threat to others because of their compliance to war's demands of killing civilians which resulted in their loss of benevolence and compassion and turned them into an extreme embodiment of brutality and wickedness. Due to this struggle for survival and the adverse circumstances of the

war, this veteran describes the subsequent psychological tribulations which he suffers and marks his psyche and leads to his absolute alteration. The veterans are conscious of this moral, emotional and psychological change that determined their-never ending guilt and produced a shameful memory that is traumatic and burdensome. The veterans' total loss of moral balance affected their deeply instilled patriotism which eventually suffered a gradual descent into the madness of determining what's right or just and what's wrong or utter evil.

Brock and Lettini continue to describe the soldiers' bitter alteration after war and the war's inadequacy in preparing the soldiers to adjust to the civilian life. "There is a boot camp to prepare for war, but there is no boot camp to reintegrate veterans to civilian life. They were taught reflexive fire shooting, but not how to recover a shredded moral identity" (42). This statement illustrates the military's ruthless strategies in its preparation for war where their only concern is to provide the soldiers with the essential means to launch violence or killing acts on others in the battlefield without planning any psychological guidance for any possible repercussions.

The absence of the military's psychological instruction of the war's expected horrors constructs the Marines' tough psyche, creating a solid stamina that will strip them of their individual and moral personality. The military's strategic plan of eroding the soldiers' emotional and moral repository succeeds in transforming them into tools of murder rather than a means to preserve peace. The soldiers' awareness of becoming pawns of destruction that move according to their commanders' desires leads them to perceive themselves as victims of a broader political conflict which demoralizes them.

Mac, a war veteran, affirms this notion of victimization, "We are the victims of politicians' hypocrisy, the scapegoats for the inevitable affront of the national conscience, and the sacrificial lambs sent to slaughter in retribution for our collective guilt and inadequacies" (Brock 21). This testimony shows that the veterans perceive themselves as the victims of a higher political conflict that exploited their individual, social and economic impotence to satiate the government's purpose and achieve the desired outcome of military triumph. Also, there is an evident indictment of the public's mute moral sense and which allowed the war's insensible atrocities to create the veterans' ethical crisis and lead to their inseparable culpability.

The military commanders' deficiency in addressing the soldiers' emotional and ethical confusions lead to the soldiers' deep sense of betrayal and victimization, as well as transforming their conception of the war, its causes and its inevitable consequences. Colonel Theodore Westhusing was one of the highest-ranking officers who became a victim of the Iraq war's horrors and corrupt purposes. Due to his daunting experiences in the battlefield, Westhusing was dismayed by the reprehensible truth of the war which proved to be ethically disturbing and fatal. Shortly after his compliance with the illegalities of that war, Westhusing's battle with his conscience began to cripple his ability to accept the war's ethical transgressions. His unconscious refusal of his commanders' constant pursuit of fame and recognition at the expense of killing innocent civilians and the loss of his fellow comrades guided him to choose suicide. "He died of self-inflicted wounds to the head" (Brock 41). In a farewell note that Westhusing wrote to his

commander and his wife, he describes the commanders' inadequate ethical attitude which led to his loss of trust and caused his bitter end:

> You are only interested in your career and provide no support to your staff- no mission support and you don't care. I cannot support a mission that leads to corruption, human rights abuses and liars. I am sullied -no more. I didn't volunteer to support corrupt, money grubbing contractors, nor work for commanders only interested in themselves. I came to serve honorably and feel dishonored . . . death before being dishonored any more. Trust inessential - I don't know who trust anymore. (Brock 41)

Westhusing's suicide reflects the suffering of millions of deployed soldiers who morally opposed the Iraq war, yet had to fulfill their military obligations to their country on the grounds of loyalty, patriotism or heroism. The moral crisis with which Westhusing wrestled unsettled him and caused mental and emotional deterioration which led him to choose death over dishonor. Westhusing felt a deep betrayal by his commanders for not telling him the truth of war, once he knew that truth, he felt that he committed an ethical violation towards humanity, his comrades and himself. Lastly, he felt a profound moral violation towards Iraqi civilians who deserved a chance of survival. This deep sensation of betraying one's self, country or others determined Westhusing's fate and invites to a deeper contemplation of the real reasons behind his moral crisis that led to his traumatic death. Westhusing's moral deterioration that led to his suicidal ideation is caused by the distorting of basic moral values under the name of military duties and obligations. The accumulated morally injurious events and military choices that Westhusing disapproved

of and violated the moral principles that he thought primary in preserving the military's honorable image among soldiers and the public brought about his agonizing end.

In principle, the soldiers' perception of the commander as a symbol of guardianship, protection and an ethical emblem raises the levels of their obedience and their expectations of his moral integrity. When soldiers are trained to respect and follow the orders of their military commander, they automatically perceive their leader as a guardian whose mission is to protect his followers, instruct them and carry on his obligations or duties with honor. At the times of war, the commander is always expected to meet the moral and spiritual exigencies that his military duty requires him to fulfill regardless of the consequences. Once the disciples witness a deterioration in the ethical position of their leadership, they are compelled to follow their commanders' example and commit the unethical transgressions with ease and no remorse. Brock recounts Camilo's experience, "Camilo's battalion was put in charge of the torture of prisoners. While he took pride in always participating in anything he ordered his soldiers to do, Camilo used his rank that day to watch, rather than conduct, the abuse of prisoners" (34). When the word 'abuse' becomes associated with a commander's military task at war, this reflects a massive ethical corruption and indicates the inhumane purposes of the war. Accordingly, the soldiers' compliance to the brutal treatment of civilians or prisoners and their muteness in admitting their disapproval or condemnation to such unethical approaches stems from their fear to be killed and the psychological paralysis they are trained to employ in the battlefield. As a result, these soldiers feel misguided and then lose trust in their leaders.

The Effects of Moral Injury:

The individual, social and psychological damage that moral injury inflicts upon war veterans have been highly cited as life-changing. Jonathan Shay underlines the lasting impact of this traumatic and morally compromising wound when he examines how moral injury transforms the veterans' sense of self and their relation to society and with others around them. Shay argues that "[Moral injury] deteriorates their character; their ideals, ambitions, and attachments begin to change and shrink . . . when social trust is destroyed, it is replaced by the settled expectancy of harm, exploitation, and humiliation from others" (186). This statement assures that moral injury compromises the veterans' individual identity which in turn leads to limiting their moral incentives during their struggles for survival. The veterans' moral trauma also jeopardizes their relationships with others where they find an impossibility to confide in anybody.

The returning veterans' unconscious decision to alienate themselves from others or block societal reciprocity stems from their realization that their existence became meaningless since they defied their conscience and betrayed their sense of humanity. Brock supports this notion, "Feelings of guilt, shame, meaninglessness, and alienation come from knowing that one transgressed one's most deeply held beliefs and moral values, and therefore, one's core sense of self" (54). The soldiers' ethical deficiency at the time of battle demeans their self-worth and inundates them with a never-ending cycle of self-loathing and reproach. The veterans' loss of identity is also triggered by a sense of unfamiliarity with home which was once well-known and an intimate site of belonging.

Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny best describes the veterans' daunting feelings of fear and unceasing skepticism of ever being familiar with the self or home again. Freud proposes that "The 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar . . . the familiar can become uncanny and frightening" (2). The veterans' return to 'home' proves elusive as they attempt to re-acquaint themselves with their individual identities in a foreign place that once was called 'home' where peace and serenity are its most identifiable features. This sense of unsettling alienation that the veterans experience is established due to the unusual disparity they find between the vehement environment of the field of combat and that of the peaceful surroundings of home and civilian life. This geographic displacement causes the veterans' psychological rupture that leads to a collective privation of individuality and an absence of meaning.

Healing and Intervention:

Since Americans have been in the battlefields of World War Two, Vietnam and the recent Iraq and Afghanistan wars, it is hard to expect that the process of healing will take place overnight. Veterans of these wars are spread out over decades and they have been exposed to all kinds of physical, psychological, spiritual and moral trauma that no ordinary citizen can imagine. However, the question of whether these veterans can be truly healed is still unknown. The research that I have conducted proves that despite the agony that might accompany the healing journey, veterans still entertain a chance of recuperation, spiritual revival and a promise of momentous awakening. Seeking a permanent cure to their injured persona, the veterans' journey of homecoming to civilian

life is perilous. However, it can be achieved by the persistent support and the meticulous care of the veterans' family members and closest friends, whose firm unity can help them reintegrate within society successfully, slowly but steadily. Brock argues, "Veterans need the love, respect, and support of friends and family who know them personally and who will accompany them on the long struggle to recover from war" (97). This sense of kinship is essential because it greatly contributes to the veterans' healing process and facilitates their transition from the traumatic experiences of combat into a less intimidating societal environment where they can re-assemble their scattered pieces and be human again.

Veterans would also benefit from sharing their experiences with other veterans. Attempts at spiritual catharsis will not succeed and the healing will not ensue unless their war experiences are shared and understood by fellow veterans who have been on the battlefield and can fathom the intensity of trauma that their comrades have been exposed to. Brock and Lettini continue to argue that the emotion of camaraderie that develops between soldiers in the field of combat is necessary to be rekindled to help those veterans begin their healing voyage, where they can express their deepest fears, their emotional and psychological dilemmas and their traumatic experiences that have become agonizing memories.

This sense of emotional and psychological solidarity from other comrades who have shared similar struggles will help the veterans face their fears and share their experiences knowing that their traumatic memory of battle will not be underestimated or taken lightly. Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins affirm the necessity of comradeship in

assisting veterans to heal and can cope with their traumatic memories. "Veterans appear to use such comradeship as a means of developing social narratives about their war experiences. Being able to talk to other veterans is a way of dealing with their traumatic memories" (62). Brock and Lettini support Hunt and Robbins in their statement that comradeship is extremely essential in the veterans' healing process. They continue to illustrate that the significance of camaraderie overrides the civilians' acceptance or embracing of these veterans due to its futility in alleviating the veterans' moral or emotional suffering. Moreover, the civilians' attempts to empathize with or tolerate the veterans' difficulties after combat will not only decrease their ability to face that trauma but will also drive them to suppress the pain and perceive the moral trauma as a given that cannot be changed. In other words, due to the civilians' detachment from the truth of war and their shallow practical knowledge in matters of combat, their sympathy or commiseration will not have the desired impact in helping the veterans to heal. The civilians lack the required awareness to appreciate the magnitude of war and its horrendous repercussions of trauma and psychological impairment it inflicts on the veterans' bodies, minds, and souls.

In their implementation of Renato Rosaldo's notion of 'Imperialist nostalgia,' Brock and Lettini underline one therapeutic strategy which is conducted by clinicians called: atonement trips. These trips have been designed by therapists for Vietnam veterans to lessen their feelings of guilt and enable them to construct a sense of 'false forgiveness.' It is false because such trips do not guarantee the forgiveness of Vietnamese natives who witnessed the American soldiers' acts of violence or crimes against their

country. These trips aim at reconstructing the veterans' moral conscience and identity

rather than alleviating the other's emotional suffering due to the enormous loss of land,

family or sense of belonging. According to Brock and Lettini, the acts of kindness which

were carried out by the American soldiers towards the Vietnamese civilians such as

offering gifts or asking forgiveness help veterans "make peace with themselves, re-

humanize, and reconcile with the other, and restore the broken world order" (106). In

other words, these voyages which therapists created are attempts to retrieve the veterans'

mental and psychological serenity, reconnect with their lost humanity and rebuild the

demolished bridges between them and the victimized other. Whether these trips entailed

the Vietnamese's collective forgiveness, it was not the therapists' ultimate purpose or

concern. In the meantime, those trips and acts of generosity worked towards the veterans'

rebirth and renewing the pledges of personal and unified integrity.

Once these veterans can tolerate their painful memories and understand that these

moral injuries are inevitable consequences of war, only then will they be able to begin the

gradual development towards regaining the sense of self. Pre-war, soldiers entertain

individual identities that are well-constructed and filled with moral content. However, the

exposure to war robbed soldiers from their individuality and their ethical reserve which

transforms the soldiers' views of honor and leads to a partial and a complete absence of

identity. To help these veterans cope with their traumatic memory of war and begin their

healing process, clinicians and healthcare professionals have developed some effective

methods that prove its validity in helping them recover and reach the consensus of their

moral crisis. The recent studies have shown that there are available methods to help

veterans recover from moral injury. Litz and Maguen reveal that in the context of moral injury, patients have also "engaged in experiential exercises that entail either a charged imaginal conversation with the deceased or a compassionate and forgiving moral authority" (4). In engaging a morally injured veteran with an imaginary conversation with someone whom he killed, there is an attempt to establish an emotional connection between the veterans and their victim to lessen the veterans' moral trauma, bring them some relief and allow them to forgive themselves.

Despite these intervention methods used by clinicians to help veterans deal with their traumatic memories after war, the research has shown that the most potent strategy that helped veterans cope with such experiences was to speak up. The veterans' ability to communicate their thoughts to others who can understand their painful memories helps them to craft a narrative through which they can process their feelings, understand reminisces and eventually be able to cope with them. Hunt and Robbins continue to assure the fact that "the telling itself is part of the healing process" (63). By retelling past experiences, the veterans chronicle the facts and events that deeply affected their characters and altered their relationships with themselves, others and their present reality. Furthermore, in their attempt to construct an account of their former episodes of war, the veterans will be able to visualize the reasons behind their traumatic memory so they can move past the anguish and be able to find tranquility.

Conclusion:

Despite this urgency for promoting national loyalty and preserving the undivided devotion to one's country and inviting the soldiers to be impassioned about the war's

noble purposes, the soldiers become profoundly shaken by the ugly truth of war in which murder is the ultimate purpose and result. Instead of being loyal defenders of their country against the enemy, who happen to be innocent children and unarmed men and women, the soldiers became killers, perpetrators and invaders of basic human rights. The optical illusion of dutiful chauvinism which the soldiers have been charged with faded away during the war's chaos and the military's misrepresentation of its severe moral outcomes. These soldiers become morally wounded individuals with broken spirits whose journey to healing becomes traumatic and a relentless path of unstoppable remorse. The severity of the veterans' moral trauma is represented in their humiliating recollection of killing, death and the violations of basic moral values. The veterans believe that such ethical ideals are applicable, yet they realize that they are barren principles in the realm of war and survival.

The limited research and the lack of deeper understandings of the term moral injury which has been recently added to the dictionary of military culture urged healthcare professionals to seek further information and draw the distinctions needed between PTSD and moral trauma. The clinicians' pursuit of interpreting moral injury, examining its causes and apprehending its consequences serves them in finding successful methods to ease the veterans' suffering, calm their chaos and cure their inward distress. However, the incorporation of this term and the attempts to address its accumulating dangers upon the veterans' individuality contributes to escalating the magnitude of suffering in the veterans who are already struggling with PTSD due to the complex nature of moral trauma which tears the veterans' identity and compromises the

moral construct of their beliefs and characters. In addition to this ethical descent, the veterans become prisoners of conscience and are in a constant battle between remembrance, forgetting and self-forgiveness. The narrative of war and moral trauma necessitate the discourse of remembrance, commemoration and the veterans' willingness to forgive themselves. The veterans' moral, emotional and psychological decay is part of a broader political and societal climate that exploited their weaknesses and scapegoated them to preserve power and secure greater interests.

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