



The Phantom in the House: Women and War in Outside Paducah: The Wars at Home (Moad, 2016)

SPECIAL COLLECTION:
WOMEN OF THE IRAQ
WAR

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the representation of women in an independent theatre production on the war in Iraq titled *Outside Paducah: The Wars at Home* (2016). The play is written and performed solo by James Allen Moad II, a former Air Force pilot. It is divided into three acts, each one telling independent stories to reflect the trauma of war and its long-term consequences in war veterans and their family members at home. The three stories are set around the city of Paducah, Kentucky, located between the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, and take place during the summer of 2007. Each features a male character: a boy whose father returns from Iraq with a brain injury, a father whose son from the Marines committed suicide, and a former soldier on a visit to his hometown after returning from the war zone in Baghdad. By focusing on the role of female civilians in Moad's play, the paper will illustrate how post-war damage, treatment, and representation are primarily male-related. The equally damaged women's voices and their perspectives, whether they are civilians or members of the military, remain in the background. Their silence, therefore, fills the space of the not-said and the not-seen.

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INTRODUCTION

Outside Paducah is a play written and performed by James A. Moad. The play is a solo performance, and Moad interprets all three leading roles: a boy, a father, and a veteran. In addition to these three generations of male protagonists, other secondary characters are represented through direct references or in “pretended dialogue” to reveal the war consequences not only in the veterans but also in the family and the extended community. Aside from coping with the post-war situations, other underlying issues surface from the stories, such as the characters’ struggles to cope with basic problems such as a lack of funds and previous situations of violence at home—mainly domestic violence, racial discrimination, unemployment, and limited resources from the VA centers.

By showing these other problems, the play casts a complex net of class, gender, race, and socio-economic factors while simultaneously denouncing a lack of resources and assistance from the state or other governmental institutions to tackle the problems of underprivileged sectors.¹ By incorporating other war-victim characters, the play seeks to move away from a solely veteran-centered representation in order to show war’s broad implications and how it affects all members of society, both veterans and civilians. Yet, as this paper will show, women are underrepresented; whether on purpose or not, as the play fails to incorporate a leading female perspective, a stronger leading voice is missing to showcase how war affects women in many social roles, as wives, mothers, daughters, or women soldiers.²

GENDERING THE NATION IN WAR

Patriarchal discourse in times of war divides men and women into polarized gendered roles which equates the strong nation as virile and the weak nation as feminine. There exists a general demand for nations to be strong rather than soft or weak: a hard and tough nation should be prepared to seal itself off from others and to avoid penetration. Gendered attributes are often applied to the description of nations: “the soft national body is a feminized body, which is penetrated or invaded by others” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 2). Men embody the traditional attributes of masculinity, such as bravery and physical strength to fight in battles. War has traditionally been constructed as a masculine domain, promoting references to masculinity with a glorification of violence in the name and honor of one’s country. The discourse of war is therefore highly gendered, marking a sharp division in the different roles sexes play: men go to battle while women stay at home to care for the home and the family. There are, however, notable exceptions to this patriarchal, nationalist war

discourse, such as during World Wars I and II when women in Europe took over men’s jobs in the factories, agriculture, and running industries.

Exercising masculinity by dying in war has often been considered as a duty, sometimes even a privilege, of male citizenship in many societies. In “Selfhood, War and Masculinity” Genevieve Lloyd (1987) explores the connection between war and gender in Western society. She argues that sacrificing one’s life in battle is a sign of masculinity. Women, in turn, stay at home to prove that they are good caring mothers or spouses, ready to provide support to the returning soldiers, the healers who stay at home taking care of the family, producing more offspring for the nation, and mourning the dead. Male soldiers have widely regarded women either as comforting, psychological anchors, or as sexual commodities or rape targets. Far away in the battlefields, the memory of loved women, as a key part of strong family bonds, present or past, represents a link with a previous, safe life. Women have traditionally played the role of nurturing and caring for soldiers, while also improving their morale through admiration and support. The presence of female companions performs a crucial assisting role in the recovery of injured combatants (Goldstein, 2001).

Women have always been involved in wars, directly or indirectly, and they have always helped in the formation of nations, but until today many armies in the world have been composed exclusively of men, young men, and boys. Jeff Hearn (2003) argues that this fact, however, “should not obscure the significance of women’s military activity in particular times and particular places” (p. xi). Although there is a male predominance in many armies or military institutions around the globe, women soldiers are recruited for servicing or administrative positions within the armed forces.

Women, war, and gender politics come under discussion in Marcia Kovitz’s article “The Roots of Military Masculinity” (2003), which argues in part that women are given marginal jobs in the armies since military organizations are still identified and represented as masculine, despite the long-standing presence of women in many armed forces. The myths about men’s innate aggressiveness have made combat the last bastion for men. Kovitz contends that those who question women’s presence in the military service resort to arguments which challenge their capacity to fight in battle due to claims such as “women’s innate physiological inferiority to men in strength, stature, speed, metabolism and the incapacities due to menstruation and childbirth” (p. 2). These “constraints» make women less operationally effective than men, according to some. Further impediments for women are domestic responsibilities and child-rearing.

The integration of women into the armed forces is still a controversial issue in many armed forces around the globe. Men, on the other hand, remain unchallenged in their privileged positions, as Paul Higate argues in *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (2003). He observes that the role of women in the armed forces occurs within the context of specific missions such as peace-making (p. 205). Although 33,000 American women served in the First Gulf War and, by 1994, 90% of military jobs were already open to them, military life in the United States is still largely regarded as a predominantly masculine matter, and for many, as contended by Phillips (2006), the Iraq Wars appear to have intensified the gender fears that dragged male soldiers through the 20th century. Rejection of homosexuality and roles that traditionally perceived as womanly is widespread but mixes with a continuous prized male-to-male relationship environment that builds strong emotional bonds. This contradiction, Phillips (2006) argues, is only resolved by elevation of the value of fighting as a test of manliness. Enlisting has always been, for many young men, one way to prove their masculinity. As argued by Phillips,

Placed in a constantly renewed insecurity about their status, men must scramble to amass 'proofs' of masculinity. If a society also convinces its citizens that men love to fight and women hate to fight, or cannot fight, then that society can manipulate men to go to war, simply to verify that they are not women. (p. 2)

Becoming a soldier has long been linked with notions of youth-male behavior, a kind of rite-of-passage, to attain complete manhood. After the war, a boy came home a man, ready to assume full responsibilities. It was therefore the best way to be tested as a man, to see how to measure up in difficult circumstances, since "combat often validated masculine identity" (Parr, 2019, p. 268). Rachel Woodward (2003) places gender at the center of the construction of soldiering: becoming a soldier involves the creation, negotiation, and reproduction of gender identities. In Woodward's view, military masculinities encompass features such as physical skill, aggressive heterosexuality, and homophobia.³

WOMEN ON THE HOME FRONT

The physical and psychological traumas associated with returning from war have historically been male-related. In *A Crisis of Masculinity? Re-writing the History of Shell Shock and Gender in First World War Britain* (2013), Tracey Loughran's main contention is that throughout history, but especially in WWI, several cases of post-war trauma in

women and non-combatant males had been overlooked. This happened because shell-shock was regarded as a masculine disorder and as a condition solely suffered by those who had been in the battleground exclusively: "By accepting contemporary evaluations of shell-shock as a masculine disorder, historians have colluded in the exclusion of other groups from the claim to trauma" (p. 734). Loughran argues that scholars have been following Elaine Showalter's interpretation of shell-shock as a crisis of masculinity, "an epidemic of male hysteria" (Showalter, 1985, as cited in Loughran, 2013, p. 728), seen as a form of childish behavior and therefore unacceptable to the standards of masculinity. As a consequence, female war trauma, suffered by military nursing or home caring, has received little attention: "female war neurosis was never related to women's war service [...] the pain of women was only acknowledged when it took an appropriate feminine form" (Loughran, 2013, p. 731).

Although those directly involved or affected by trauma are the primary foci of clinical, social, and literary attention, it is also important to point out the role of supporting persons, like family members and other, closely related people. The impact of PTSD on a patient's family members appears, therefore, to be often overlooked. However, the concept of "secondary traumatization" was described as early as 1983 in family members of war veterans suffering PTSD, who then became victims of trauma themselves by being exposed to the stories told by the primary traumatized member. Secondary traumatization is the term used for the traumatization of a family member—or other helpers—when sharing painful experiences and suffering. Secondary traumatization can occur through identifying with the person they are helping when their expectations are unreal, or it can occur due to the lack of social support. These situations are encountered during the process of healing in families with a member suffering from PTSD (Figley et al., 1983).

Among psychologists, the "family" is often understood as a dynamic system connected by "interpersonal relationships that account for changes in behaviors of family members" (Figley & Kiser, 2012, p. 3). When one person in the family is traumatized, all the other family members may suffer the consequences to a variable extent depending on many factors, including the degree of the trauma and the coping mechanisms of the other family members, among others. As Figley and Kiser note, "the trauma experienced by one family member may be experienced by the entire family system. Thus, families who have been traumatized are injured systemically and are vulnerable to a wide variety of systemic dysfunction" (p. 6). Even though family members can provide unique support and help to the person who is traumatized, there

is a risk that the whole family may feel the pain and suffering, so the interpersonal relations among family members become contaminated and dysfunctional, thus leading to stress, depression, and, above all, a great deal of unhappiness: “in the process of abating posttraumatic stress reactions, supporters are quite susceptible to being traumatized themselves” (p. 32).

A specific risk factor with implications for family functioning is a detected higher risk of PTSD in females, since women are twice as likely as men to have PTSD, according to the American Psychiatric Association (2020). This is significant, as women often take the lead in managing daily family life and caring for the children. Married male war veterans diagnosed with PTSD experience serious difficulties with their wives who, in turn, become indirect victims. Spouses are a major support to married veterans who are experiencing symptoms of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (Dekel et al., 2005). It has been noted that OCO veterans, Post 9/11 Overseas Contingency Operation, have had negative experiences when compared to veterans from previous combats; what makes them different is that they were the first sustained ground combat since the Vietnam War (Hoge et al., 2004), with the result that 75% of veterans were wounded by explosive devices (Helwick, 2011).⁴

Moreover, more military families are now negatively impacted by PTSD, which weakens family bonds and creates hostile reactions toward partners and their children (Peterson et al., 2014). Upon examining the experiences of U.S. spouses living with OCO veterans who suffer PTSD and traumatic injuries, Yambo et al. (2016) argue that these OCO military spouses undergo “tremendous stress” (p. 549). Extensive clinical research has equally shown that

Living with a veteran diagnosed with PTSD places a very heavy burden on the wife and poses a serious risk of burnout [...]. Wives of veterans suffering from PTSD are exposed to greater burden of life and suffer from stronger cumulative physical, emotional and behavioral effects of prolonged stress. (Klaric et al. 2010, pp. 15; 18)

Due to the veteran’s dysfunction at work and the mental or physical injuries, the burden falling on the wives also includes financial difficulties. This has also been confirmed by the study conducted by Klaric et al. (2010), among others, in which they state that their results confirm “a significantly higher number of wives of PTSD affected veterans [...] have a lower economic status” (p. 19). In a study about health spillovers among military spouses, Jason Schnittker (2019) observes that the health of military spouses declines when their spouses suffer from service-connected disabilities:

“the health of military spouses is impacted by an assorted of spillovers related indirectly or directly to military service and occurring both among those married to active personnel and those married to veterans” (p. 64).

Women on the home front in war are often on the periphery, and yet it is difficult to underestimate their role, their strength, and the bedrock that they create for those who go off to war and return home. Given that war trauma has an increasingly severe impact on female partners, as research has shown, *Outside Paducah* could have engaged in a more active discussion on these issues.

THE PHANTOM IN THE HOUSE: FEMALE CIVILIANS AND INVISIBILITY

The first part of the play titled *Our Ghost* features Moad playing the part of a seven-year-old boy from Mound City, Illinois, whose father has returned from the war with brain damage. The stage directions indicate that it is an early evening in June 2007, outside a modest house. A projection screen in the background displays photos of soldiers’ faces from several wars, including the American Civil War (1861–65). The whole scene takes place the day the family is about to move away from their house so the father can join a VA center for rehabilitation: “heading up north to a special hospital just for snipers and other war heroes to get all better” (p. 19). This first part centers on the story of a child who is forced to leave the place where he was born, a sad departure from his close friend and the life he knows. As he struggles to comprehend the dimension of the tragedy, his feeling is divided between fear of the unknown future that awaits him and hope for a recovery of the father: “we’d leave that old ghost behind” (p. 12).

The most relevant female character in the whole play is undoubtedly the boy’s mother in part 1. The boy’s father is very passive due to his permanent brain damage: “He’s got what folks ‘round here call *the slowness!*” (p. 18, italics in the original). The young boy cannot fully comprehend what this is, even if he understands and suffers the consequences, as he notices his father is absent, gone into his own thoughts: “I squeeze papa’s hand, hopin’ he’ll squeeze back, but there ain’t much there...He leans into the window lookin’ hard as if he can see somethi’ we can’t” (p. 21). The mother takes on all responsibilities for the home and family. Her role includes nursing, cleaning, and caring for her husband since he has not even been able to walk or move:

When it’s nice out, mama sets papa out here in that old rocking chair facing us boys. He likes to stare out into the trees. I always straighten out his baseball cap before I go on to play. No matter how awfully tired he is, it’s nice to know he’s watchin’ over me. (p. 13)

The care responsibilities of the mother are outlined by her son: “Mama said they’re gonna make him all better at the VA...give him all the medicine he needs (p. 14) [...]. She’s always on the phone talkin’ and waitin’ to talk with folks up the VA” (p. 16). Due to her husband’s disability, this woman needs to take full responsibility for the house and family. She is determined to make the best out of the situations and places all her energy into protecting the most vulnerable in the family. She has, for instance, gotten rid of the guns in the house to prevent any further tragedies:

[Mother] told me we ain’t got no use for guns anymore. She took both of papa’s rifles out of the house before he come back from the war. I thought he might put up a fight about it, but he don’t say or do much about nothin’ these days. (p. 13)

This woman knew what she was doing, since her father, a traumatized veteran, had shot himself dead when she was a child, so she is using her past experience to prevent a similar incident.

There is a long history of war traumas in the mother’s family, who also underwent a horrible experience as a child since her father suffered from PTSD: “Mama says there’s been a ghost on the land as long as she can recall. It comes and goes, and I know she’s right cuz she told me about the screamin’ back when she was a girl!” (p. 15). The house seems to be haunted by memories and traumas, and the only explanation that the boy can find is that there has been a ghost dwelling in the house for a long time. In his innocent mind, the boy believes that the ghost comes at night when he hears the father shouting and crying in the middle of the night due to horrible nightmares: “Last week the ghost did some awful screaming in the night” (p. 13); “Sometimes at night it puts off a horrible howlin’ sound, and I hide under the blanket” (p. 15). The ghost is the personification of what is left of the father. No longer the man he used to be, he is a ghost or shadow of his former self.

The story of this family’s misfortunes begins way back in the Civil War. Thanks to the government, Lieutenant Joseph James, an ancestor, had been rewarded with a hundred acres of land for his heroism during the war: “He had a wooden leg, but he got on a horse anyways, and rode all the way out here from Pennsylvania” (p. 17). Due to unemployment and money shortage, younger generations have been splitting the land and losing almost all the properties. Even the house where the boy lives seems to be on mortgage: “the bank’s gonna take it back” (p. 19). The family struggles not only with the father’s health but also with financial difficulties. The mother, in her role of full-time caretaker, is prevented from finding employment

elsewhere, the disability pension not being enough. The boy reckons that it is Lt James’s ghost who is mad at the younger generations for the mishandling of the family assets. Lt James is buried in the local cemetery where there used to be a picture of him dressed in the civil war uniform. This picture got lost during a flood and was never replaced. This suggests that war heroes are forgotten, and their sacrifices for the nation get little recognition or none at all. Here, Moad points an accusing finger at the governmental institutions for not taking care of war memorials or war statues to preserve the collective memory of war.

What is even more dramatic than conserving the memorabilia of the war heroes is the tragic loss of people and the remaining traumas for the families, wives, and children. For instance, the boy’s grandfather committed suicide when his mother was still a child. To try and make some sense of this tragedy the boy blames the ghost in the house, while he argues that his grandfather was, in fact, trying to kill it:

My grandpa tried to kill the ghost [...] it got on Grandpa so bad that he took a shot at it—BANG... but he missed ... Bullet went right through Grandpa’s brain instead. Killed him dead. Mama don’t say nothin’ about it, since it was her daddy. (p. 14)

This last sentence shows how the mother avoids talking about her childhood traumas, these tragic memories still too painful for her to bring them into the present. Not being able to talk openly about it implies that her wound is not cured. Over and above this, she needs to keep struggling with the consequences of war in her adult life with her injured husband. In the following example, a desperate woman cries out for help for her family, but at the same time she is assertive and takes action: “I heard mama talking it down, sayin’ how it needed to ‘stop it right now.’ She asked God to step in and give her a hand, and I think that done the trick for a while” (p. 13).

Part two, titled *Cairo*, tells the story of a 51-year-old white man, Dan, in a bank in Ballard County, Kentucky, in July 2007. The backdrop displays photos of Cairo, Illinois, depicting racial strife and decay, followed by the image of a devastated Iraq during the war. The audience is encouraged to link the war waged on far-off Iraqi communities with a similar war directed against the poorer rural American communities. This suggests that somehow each war is every war. The geographical and social details may differ, but the audience understands that war is war. During his conversation with the bank manager, the man recalls previous episodes of his own life and his son’s, the Marine soldier who committed suicide after having been deployed in Iraq twice. He also recalls all the difficulties he had to

overcome in raising him on his own after the mother had abandoned them: “When a woman runs off and leaves you raise your son on your own, well...it tests a man” (p. 30).

The Father’s memories are delivered when he rises from the chair and steps into the spotlight. His most traumatic memory being, understandably, the death of his son:

When you see your son’s body hanging from the rafters of a building a man has a choice to make. When you hold him in your arms, you ask yourself if you’re worthy of the life you’ve been given, and when you close his eyes for good, you either start believing again or else you’ll get trapped right there forever. (p. 37)

In desperation for the loss of his only son, this father pleads for an opportunity to rebuild his life, “time to start believin’ again” (p. 26), and this is the reason he is present in the bank, asking for a loan for the company he owns, called Dan’s Demolition, a metaphor for his own life, to destroy and then to build again from scratch, or to rebuild out of the debris. This connects with the final plea: “Can you help a man rebuild a life?” (p. 38). There is no answer. The printed version of the play displays a blank page, while a silence of the on-stage version creates a powerful sense of hopelessness and despair.

The main female characters in part two are Bell, Ester, and Dan’s former wife. Dan’s former wife, whose name is not mentioned in the play and is only referred to in passing, ran off. What is never openly explained in the play is that she really died from a drug overdose. She is the reason for Dan leaving the town up north in search of a prosperous future for himself and his son. Bell is a black prostitute Dan falls in love with. She is kind, sweet, helps him to stop drinking, and saves him from a life in the streets. Bell is portrayed as trapped in a world of racism, prostitution, and hopelessness. Dan feels connected to her and identifies with her from the start of the relationship: “There wasn’t much difference between Bell and me, just two folks strugglin’ to get from one day to the next I’d like to think me and her had something special for awhile” (p. 35). This is how Bell is described by Dan:

I found myself driving across the river one night... the whiskey talkin’ to me. You wanna ask the girl to stop...doin’ what she’s doin’...though you know she ain’t got a choice. When Bell saw the empty bottle, she grabbed me by the hand and took me home with her...said she didn’t want me to die on the road...and kindness like that...well...I started helpin’ with the rent. No promises, just clean sheets, and a little quiet conversation...once and awhile she’d

open a bottle of wine and go on about needin’ to believe in a better life out there—the world bending toward justice...talk of seeing what this big country has to offer, but bein’ afraid of what she’d find out there. (pp. 33–34)

Ester is Dan’s son’s teacher and librarian who is a strong influence on the boy when he is still young, motherless, and unmotivated at school, and is first introduced as the local librarian:

Heard about a librarian across the river in Cairo—an old Irish woman workin’ magic with boys like him, so I set up a meetin’... Ester was her name. my son brought his drawings with him, a bid old stack of ‘em, and she sat right down and had a look-eye at everyone. Gave me a little wink, and when she ran her fingers through that red hair of his, it was like that boy come alive again...two years [...] and that was the first time I seen him smile. (p. 31)

Ester offers the hope and guidance that Dan desires for his son. Unfortunately, Dan’s son joins the Army, and after coming back from war, he kills himself after being unable to cope with the war’s wounds. Both Bell and Ester play key roles in the lives of the Father and his son, as moral supporters, guides, and lovers. Unfortunately, the reality of life hits again. Ester dies soon after the boy returns from the war, and Bell departs from the city, leaving Dan more alone than ever, without her or his son.

The third part, titled “Quittin’ Meth, or A few disclaimers we should have mentioned before you signed up to serve,” opens the stage with a series of statements, or disclaimers, projected on the backdrop. These statements are mostly directed to the younger generations that are considering joining the military forces. Moad is talking directly to potential soldiers, warning them of the risks they would face in military life:

If you engage in combat, it’s highly probable that you will suffer a form of mental trauma that will linger with you for the rest of your life [...] The anger you’ll experience at yourself, your nation, and the people you once held dear, may be overwhelming [...] If you’re a woman, odds are that you’ll endure some form of sexual trauma [...] When you come home, you may never feel quite safe again [...] You’re far more likely to be homeless and have difficulty finding employment than your civil peers [...] The Veterans Administration has limited resources, so it will get to you when it can, in a few months or longer. Maybe when it’s too late to help. (p. 39)

Moad explicitly mentions in these opening statements that the risks for women are of a sexual nature and that they will be exploited as sexual objects for male pleasure. More, he suggests that probably their “enemy” is within their camp rather than outside. Military Sexual Trauma (MST)⁵ is mentioned by the author here but not further developed by any of the characters.

This third story portrays a young veteran on a return visit to his hometown after having been deployed to Iraq. Highly nostalgic but hopeless, it traces a night in the life of a former soldier who has become a meth addict trying to cope with his experience of war. He is characterized as a 28-year-old white man dressed in jeans, combat boots, and a baseball hat placed backward on his head. He sits stage right on a park bench, and a bar is stage left. On walking through what used to be his childhood neighborhood, dreadful memories come alive about the death of his little sister: “My little sister in the back of my mind, her body bleeding a life away onto the pavement—those young eyes turning the world cold” (p. 44). He also has a memory of his mother dancing and singing and working at the salon and a violent father. He cannot summon the courage to pass by his former family house; it is simply too painful.

In the local bar, he meets some old mates and acquaintances, strikes up a conversation with some other strangers, but all of his past habits of hanging out with friends and flirting with younger girls have become meaningless. While still in the bar, he sees a fellow comrade who lost a leg on the battlefield: “It’s Will, his right leg replaced by something stuffed into an old tennis shoe [...] All I can see now is the dark whole of him” (p. 49). This friend tells him how he got injured in Fallujah, Iraq, and how after that he became addicted to drugs and needed to go into rehab—the title indicates this. The soldier is tortured by flashbacks: “When I closed my eyes, I swear I could see the whole place burning all the way from that Baghdad morgue” (p. 47). This third act closes when the protagonist realizes how, deep inside himself, he is a changed man, and he is unsure how to cope with the new pain and loneliness. His only desire is to go back to happier times: “I want it all...to be beautiful again” (p. 53), a wish that he fears he will never experience, and he wonders if beauty ever existed in his life at all, with a dead sister and a violent father.

The play raises awareness of the civilian women and children that were innocently and tragically killed by American fire in the Middle East conflicts. For example, in part 3, in a flashback, the veteran mentions the fragmented remains of children and women that were hidden from the public eye:

The stacks of bodies I was guarding from the eyes of the world [...] I’d peeked inside body bags filled with

school kids and old women ... I studied the open eyes of tortured men, their fingers, hands and heads sliced away on the road to paradise. I’d seen the whole fucking world burn by then. (p. 47)

The third part includes an array of tangential female characters: Trista, the veteran’s sister, his mother, whom the audience might assume has been ill-treated by her husband, and the women at the bar, including the silent and unidentified young girls. Even if there is not a description of these secondary characters, they help to paint a picture of the veteran’s world, and the shattered relationships, lost promise, and descent into depravity that happens in the old rust belt towns that have been devastated by the consequences of war, the loss of jobs and opportunities for the future.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to shed light on the significance of the largely invisible presence of women and the feminine in Moad’s war narratives and his attempt to provide varied perspectives regarding war trauma. The main female character in *Outside Paducah* is to be found in part 1. A woman, in her role of Mother, is portrayed as the caretaker and guardian of the family narrative, bearing a heavy burden on her shoulders, as she desperately struggles to create a future for the entire family, one not limited by past trauma. This woman, complying with her role in the patriarchal structure, is mediated through the eyes of her son, who tells his own perception of reality and the struggles in the family.

The absence of stronger female voices and perspectives imply that war traumas are primarily male-related. The actual landscape of war involves men as fighters, and Moad’s play criticizes the fact that the state uses men to act within the false implications of fighting for freedom, democracy, and truth. The play shows that the scenes of war are brought back to the homes and families who become equally demoralized in the perpetuation of war in their homeland. The fighters return as ghosts of their previous selves and haunt their spouses, children, and friends from one generation to another.

NOTES

¹ For an author’s explanation about these harsh realities and how joining the military provides a way out for the unprivileged youngsters, please see interview by the author.

² When asked about this underrepresentation of women, Moad argues that gender is almost superfluous in the way he conceived the stories, and what matters to him is the emotional

truth of the work. He explains how he has been working on other female characters to incorporate a female perspective. Please see the interview by the author.

- 3 The transformation of civilians into soldiers is expressed through body and clothes for it is the uniformed body that is trained to become a soldier. The “squaddie” or “squaddy” (military slang for ordinary soldiers) is the British cultural stereotype that embodies military masculinity (Woodward, 2003).
- 4 The number of wounded US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq exceeds 52,000 (US Department of Defense, *Immediate release casualty status* updated 10 August 2020).
- 5 The author briefly discusses MST in the interview. For more information on MST please read: Castro et al. (2015); Lucas et al. (2018), Ritchie and Naclerio (2015); amongst others.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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