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GEOGRAPHIES OF TERROR
Homecoming and Displacement in Global War on Terrorism Fiction

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After the September 11th attacks on New York, the US found itself engaged in a seemingly endless series of conflicts across the Middle East and the rest of the world. While American soldiers certainly saw no shortage of wars in the twentieth century, it is undeniable that the new millennium has—so far—been characterized by an endless effort on the part of the United States to police distant places in order to maintain a geopolitical stability that best aligns with its interests. The hemispheric reach of what could only be described—at the beginning of the twenty-first century—as the last remaining global superpower, coupled with the traumatic moment of 9/11, made sure that American intervention in foreign conflicts in the postwar period (Korea, Vietnam, Iraq in 1990) swiftly turned into an even denser net of military operations as well as large-scale campaigns in which the US openly acted as an invading power. Modern American warfare became ever more itinerant and far-reaching, just as war struck home soil for the first time in decades.

Consequently, throughout the years, American war narratives increasingly focused on the soldier's voyage to distant lands, as in the case of Vietnam, only to recently transition into the realm of diffused, globalized warfare. Accordingly, this article aims at tracking the development of American war narratives as characterized by the global and temporally indefinite nature of US conflicts in the twenty-first century, with an emphasis on the endless movement of people that is generated by—and at the same time fuels—these wars. Focusing mostly on literature produced by American veterans, I argue that, in contrast with previous works linked to other conflicts, recent war narratives of the so-called Global War on Terrorism, such as Phil Klay's

Missionaries (2020) and Elliot Ackerman's *Places and Names* (2019) emphasize the global interconnectedness and temporal indeterminacy of these incessant military operations through the depiction of vagrant characters as well as through formal choices—like the employment of multiple perspectives—that help in undoing the conventional soldier's journey.

Unlike "traditional" literary soldiers, who lose their innocence after discovering the horrible reality of war, like Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), GWOT veterans *literally* cannot return home: cyclical deployments to different war zones engulf them in an endless cycle in which violence intersects with economic interests—akin to medieval *condottieri*, they frequently develop into war experts who can remuneratively contribute to the next war. My argument here is that GWOT literature not only displaces the narration of war domestically with a focus on the "home front," but it also widens its scope by showing the global consequences of the United States' involvement in several foreign conflicts around the world. Therefore, in this essay I will suggest that the nomadic nature of the people involved in these conflicts is coherent with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's idea of the war machine, which, theorized in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), appears in nomadic societies and works in open opposition to the power of the State, but is later appropriated by it (420). Once this appropriation is complete, the war machine takes total war as its primary objective, and even surpasses it: "The war machine reforms a smooth space that now claims to control, to surround the entire earth. Total war itself is surpassed, toward a form of peace more terrifying still" (421). This new geography of terror, encompassing the whole globe, bears the trace of American warfare—wherever there is war, the US is present.

The pervasive nature of the war machine ensures that no individual can evade its power, and one of the notable developments of recent American war literature is its attempt at capturing this universal influence by abandoning the lone American's point of view and aspiring to embrace a more polyphonic and varied array of narrators. Noncombatants—especially non-Americans—are depicted as being characterized by the same nomadic qualities as those that characterize American soldiers. Forced to abandon their native lands because of war and its ensuing destruction, these individuals possess far less *motility* compared to their American counterparts. Intended as the ability to move autonomously, or the "specific set of characteristics that allows an actor to be mobile" (Kaufmann and Audikana 41), motility is a concept used in transport studies and sociology

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to assess the capacity for movement as opposed to movement *per se*. Haunted by their initial experience of war, these characters seem unable to escape their connection with armed conflicts because they are quite literally everywhere—the global nature of contemporary warfare, coupled with the limited agency when it comes to their travels, leaves little room for escape for the most vulnerable. GWOT literature often depicts paradoxical encounters between these groups: former American soldiers in search for yet another war meet those that have been displaced by previous conflicts and have inevitably ended up in spaces dominated by organized violence. Travel and war intersect, exposing the complex and uneven nature of human movement around warfare.

War has always been inextricably linked to travel, whether it be an attraction for young and hopeful reporters, desperate civilians seeking refuge, or soldiers stationed in foreign lands. Early American narratives such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1827–1841) explored war on the American frontier, while Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps* (1865) and Herman Melville's *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866) addressed in poetry the fratricidal violence of the American Civil War. Indeed, typical war stories of the time are rife with youthful protagonists who want to prove themselves on distant battlefields, only to find out that the stories they have been fed about war, virtue, and honor are a bitter lie. Leo Tolstoy's prince Andrei in *War and Peace* (1867), Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage*, Ernest Hemingway's Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), although set apart by their own specificities, all follow the familiar "post-heroic" plot that works to undo the "dulce et decorum est" adage. Indeed, this trend was not limited to literary fiction—according to Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), British wartime poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon helped in exposing in verse the absurdity of the early twentieth century "conception of war as strenuous but entertaining" (25) propagated by works of popular literature that "demonstrate[ed] how much wholesome fun is to be had at the training camp" (28), and that were often authored by civilians who had little to no knowledge of the war.

American war narratives of the Vietnam-era arguably continued the legacy of modern war stories that rejected the valorization of "naïve" heroism that characterized the Greco-Roman tradition, in which acts of valor in war were memorialized for the benefit of the benefit of the state, which L. V. Pitcher calls a "nexus of war, memorialization, and artistic prestige" (73). Works like, for instance, Thomas Pynchon's

Gravity's Rainbow (1973), as well as novels and short stories by Kurt Vonnegut and Tim O'Brien seem to have been formally impacted by the traumatic nature of combat, and accordingly display the temporal textual features associated with PTSD or, as Mark Heberle puts it in his book about Tim O'Brien titled *A Trauma Artist* (2001), these texts imitate "traumatization through style, organization of narrative, and point of view. Among the characteristic devices of such enactments are repetition; fragmentation; violation of temporal sequence" (15). However, the healing of the wounds of war is not only synonymous with the repetition of the traumatic event and the recollection of one's experience over time, but it also coincides—most often—with the soldier's journey towards their home, a supposed journey towards peace.

The impossibility of adjusting to civilian life after a conflict, and therefore the inability to truly "go home," is a common trope in war stories. Forty years before the war in Vietnam—the event that is most associated with a fallout in military-civilian relations—Ernest Hemingway addressed the topic in "Soldier's Home" (1925), a short story in which an American soldier returns to his hometown after WWI. According to Steven Trout, the story epitomizes the homecoming process for the veterans of the Great War as the nation yearned for a return to the life before the war, which he describes as "a fundamentally backward-looking, escapist impulse prompted by the death, amid the Versailles Conference and the League of Nations debacle, of Wilsonian idealism and all the self-righteous fervor that had fueled the Great Crusade" (11). The struggle that many veterans go through as they switch faraway battlefields for the supposed comforts of home are indeed the subject of many contemporary American war stories, and especially of those written by veterans.

Notably, this allure of war that characterizes American soldiers and veterans is also extended to nonfighting Americans, and is certainly older than the War on Terror. About ten years before the September 11th attacks, in the opening pages of the autobiographically inspired novel *An Afghanistan Picture Show* (1992), William T. Vollman noted the captivating draw that war has on the protagonist's mind and identified it as the primary reason for his journey to a distant land: "once upon a time there was a Young Man who wanted to be more than he really was. This made him unhappy. He decided to go to Afghanistan and take pictures of the bullets whizzing past his ears" (13). In the book, the alter-ego of a young Vollmann—a civilian—is drawn to a foreign war in which the US are involved only in a supporting role, and he decides to travel across the world autonomously to supposedly increase American empathy towards the Afghan refugees

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that the war has created. Yet, as Michele Hardesty has noted in a 2009 article titled "Looking for the Good Fight," Vollmann's ambitions are "linked to the currents of US power" (100). Indeed, both textual and paratextual information make apparent the fact that the protagonist (and Vollmann's) position as an American traveler and storyteller comes with several implications. According to Hardesty, like many American protagonists abroad that came before, Vollmann's "young man" is a stand in for the nation and its global influence, and his experience serves as a representation of the "well-intentioned failure" (104) of American foreign policy and international relations.

Vollman's book focuses on an American character traveling to a foreign war in which his country was not directly involved, but was nonetheless an interested party that actively financed one of the factions. Therefore, the character's presence in Afghanistan serves as a reminder of the power that the US projected in the Middle East during the Cold War, an influence which would soon turn into direct military involvement with the First Gulf War, whose short duration and swift success acted as a misleading red-herrings for the future of American warfare. As Barry Buzan noted during the first few years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in a 2006 article in *International Affairs*, the Global War on Terrorism was strategically modelled on the rhetoric of the Cold War, arguing that it could "offer Washington a dominant, unifying idea that would enable it to reassert and legitimize its leadership of global security" (1101) in the absence of the defunct communist threat. The global and transnational nature of this war, waged against state and non-state actors alike against the *threat* of terrorism, necessarily raises questions about the role that the US and its military play on the international stage.

The literature of the Global War on Terror seems to be concerned with issues that closely resemble those depicted in Vollman's *An Afghanistan Picture Show*. However, rather than following an American protagonist who discovers other cultures during a conflict, a number of recent American war narratives try to embrace more "local" perspectives instead of solely focusing on American experiences: many of the American novels that have been published in the last twenty years have a non-American protagonist, or at least feature sections that show Iraqi or Afghan points of view. Some notable examples are Elliot Ackerman's *Green on Blue* (2015), Roy Scranton's *War Porn* (2016), and Phil Klay's *Missionaries*, just to name a few. The first of these works employs a young Afghan protagonist who rises through the ranks of a local militia, the second contains many sections that focus on Qasim, an Iraqi interpreter, while Klay's book, the last in this list, presents its story from both American and Colombian points of view.

According to David Eisler, compared to the American war literature that emerged in response to the Vietnam war, another innovative feature of GWOT literature is that many of its stories take place in the United States, when soldiers come home from war and, in a way, bring war home for the first time. In his recent book *Writing Wars*, he notes that there has been a "shift in narrative content in which contemporary war novels place far more emphasis on the home front compared with the novels written about the Vietnam War" (109). The issue of homecoming is obviously not new in war literature, and it has been treated extensively by Susan Farrell in *Imagining Home: American War Fiction from Hemingway to 9/11* (2017). According to Farrell, American war writers of the twentieth century, such as Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Vonnegut, or Tim O'Brien have frequently addressed this desire for return, because "their male characters repeatedly imagine domestic spaces as alternatives to experiences on the front lines" (9). Although Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990) and *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994), as well as Hemingway's "Soldier's Home" serve as notable examples of texts related to the war in Vietnam and the World Wars that take place partly—or mostly in the United States, Eisler's considerations are fairly accurate. Indeed, a growing number of authors have decided to focus on the aftermath of the War on Terror and, more specifically, on the relationship between American veterans and civilians who seem thoroughly uninterested in their nation's combat operations. This is especially true of fiction after 9/11, which follows the tradition that sees "the domestic realm of the home front and the public realm of the front lines as intimately intertwined" (Farrell 13), but does so almost inevitably, as the violence of the attacks on the World Trade Center quite literally brought war home for the first time in over sixty years.

Indeed, even if the attack on Pearl Harbor proved to be an extremely tragic but powerful moment in American history, acting as the tipping point that ended American non-interventionism, the last trace of warfare on American soil was, compared to 9/11, a distant tragedy that befell the American military on a distant territory, thousands of miles from the continental United States. The attack on the World Trade Center, on the other hand, struck a symbol of American power in the country's most populous city, killing thousands of civilians while shattering the invulnerability that the US seemed to have reached after the end of the Cold War. This event arguably changed the spatiality of the American conception of modern warfare, realizing the fear of terrorism and heralding in the era of endless counterinsur-

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gency campaigns. As the towers dedicated to world trade collapsed, the American war machine became truly global.

It is worth noting, then, that along with the temporal dimension of war and its telling, which has historically been the focus of many critical studies, as Kate McLoughlin (107) argues in *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* (2011), the Global War on Terror has seen some changes in the exploration of modern war's spatial dimension, which has become one of the most salient characteristics of its literature. Contemporary war stories display the interconnectedness of the "home front" with the countless battlefields where American soldiers are stationed, highlighting the rhizomatic nature of contemporary warfare. In this way, these narratives show how incessant movement constitutes a necessary part of this practice, revealing the nomadic nature of those affected by war in one way or another. If, according to Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), "every story is a travel story—a spatial practice" (115), then war stories, which especially in the case of American narratives see their protagonist traveling to distant lands for the first time while they grapple with the practical and moral intricacies of armed conflicts, are particularly relevant cases of narratives in which travel often corresponds to personal development over time. As Kai Mikkonen explains in his article "The 'Narrative is Travel' Metaphor: Between Spatial Sequence and Open Consequence," travel is frequently used as a metaphor for narrative, and it presupposes a certain understanding of causality and linear time: "The travel concept, and especially the journey plot pattern, manifests a specific model of temporality and causality—travel entails the arrangement of points of actuality in temporal order" (287). As I have already pointed out, modern war stories have been, traditionally, constructed as fairly linear travel stories in which a young soldier departs their land, travels either nationally or internationally to a combat zone, and comes back a changed person. However, many narratives of the War on Terror do not follow this relatively straightforward path.

The stories of what have alternatively been called the "forever wars" disrupt such conceptions of time and space and show the omnidirectional spatial and temporal propagation of violence that results from the US involvement in multiple, simultaneous conflicts around the world. If earlier war stories depicted the difficulties of American veterans in going back home and adjusting to civil society once again while battling with the (in)visible scars of combat trauma, many narratives of the War on Terror alter these homecoming stories to show the postwar peregrination of both soldiers and civilians. Caught

in the network of conflicts that span the entire globe, the wanderings of American veterans resemble those of the protagonists of picaresque novels as they move from one conflict to another or are deployed multiple times to the same war, with "incomplete" homecomings in the middle. The consequences of their actions in country, however, are decidedly serious, as local civilians are killed or displaced by the conflicts in which they are involved and are set on the same path of perpetual travel.

Diasporas and (quasi)mercenarism are not the only issues that play a central role in GWOT literature: the economic entanglements of contemporary war zones are also shown to ensure the unending nature of military mobility. As Achille Mbembe argues in *Necropolitics* (2019), modern armed groups, whether linked to state actors or not, configure themselves as Deleuzoguattarian war machines that are fundamentally different from the traditional armies of the past:

> A war machine combines a plurality of functions. It has the features of a political organization and a mercantile company. It operates through capture and depredations and can even coin its own money. To fuel the extraction and export of natural resources located in the territories they control, war machines forge direct connections with transnational networks (85).

In contemporary warfare, war machines are polymorphous by nature and can, at times, be associated with nation states, while regular armies can "readily appropriate some of the characteristics of war machines" (85). As Mbembe explains, modern wars are not waged to control territory, but to swiftly defeat an enemy while disregarding side effects (84), thus creating zones of unstable and fragmented political power where war machines come to be economically influential in the way resources are extracted from war zones: "The concentration of activities connected with the extraction of valuable resources around these enclaves has […] turned the enclaves into privileged spaces of war and death. War itself is fed by the increased sales of the products extracted" (86). In other words, modern war zones become self-replicating, fertile ground for new armed conflicts to spring periodically and profitably.

These lands bear the marks of total war, which is enacted by states and fueled by the economic interests of capitalism. As Deleuze and Guattari note, "the factors that make State war total war are closely connected to capitalism: it has to do with the investment of constant capital in equipment, industry, and the war economy, and the investment of variable capital in the population in its physical and mental aspects (both as warmaker and as victim of war)" (421). The State war machine, however, also breeds its own opposing forces: "the very

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conditions that make the State or World war machine possible, in other words, constant capital (resources and equipment) and human variable capital, continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines" (422). In contemporary warfare, these opposing factions regulate the movement of people as they battle each other, maintaining a complex, symbiotic relationship.

These characteristics are extremely apparent in Phil Klay's novel *Missionaries*, in which State interests are invariably tied to those of guerilla and paramilitary groups. In the novel, various characters belonging to the various groups act as focalizers—as readers, we closely follow the story as it is experienced by one character at a time—while their stories slowly converge towards the kidnapping and death of some of the protagonists. Unlike Klay's previous book, *Redeployment* (2014), a collection of short stories about soldiers and veterans set both in Iraq and the United States, *Missionaries* delves deeply in the interconnectedness of America's wars, and takes place on three continents—that is to say, North America, South America, and Asia. The novel is divided into several sections that focus on one or more characters at once, usually featuring the name of the main character as well as the year on the opening page. Although Klay does not use place names in the same way, the geographic breadth of the interconnected stories of the book is unquestionable. For example, the narration sometimes switches from Colombia to the US, from the US to Afghanistan, and so on, but at the end, the narration converges around an event—the kidnapping of Lisette, an American reporter—that brings the four protagonists of the story together. Some of the characters, but especially Americans, move around the world following conflicts, like in the case of Lisette, who, at the end of the novel, says that she had a rather extensive assortment of wars to choose from before coming to Colombia. Talking to one of the other main characters, Mason, who is a US Army liaison in Colombia and an Iraq veteran, she says: "'When I came here […] Diego promised me a good war.' [to which Mason replies:] 'Consider the competition.' He knew he'd rather be here than in Afghanistan, or the Horn of Africa, or the Philippines" (387).

Diego is another character who has ended up in Colombia passing through the wars in the Middle East. More specifically, he has seen combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and is now in Colombia doing what he considers boring, run-of-the-mill tasks when compared to the action of the war in the Middle East. Unlike Lisette, he is a staunch supporter of the series of military operations that the United States engages in across the world. Being in what he calls his "second decade"

of involvement in America's wars, he tells Lisette: "Look, maybe America hasn't been paying attention, but we've gotten very good at fighting these bulshitty wars. Just look at the stats. Numbers of police trained. Number of independent indig operations. Violence up, violence down. Things are getting better. The numbers don't lie" (252). Even though most of the action takes place in South America and the Middle East, the United States' looming presence is always palpable in *Missionaries*. And not only through the American characters whose decisions influence the lives of countless locals, but also with the constant realization by said characters of the hegemonic pull of American money and American culture.

This acute awareness of the (sometimes not so) subtle ways in which the United States influences faraway lands plays a significant part in Elliot Ackerman's memoir *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning*, which depicts this global reach while offering the experience of a former Marine traveling to a war zone after multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. In accordance with the title of his book, which gestures towards the famous passage in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* in which Frederic Henry states that in war "only the names of places had dignity" (161), Ackerman demonstrates this preoccupation with space during an encounter with a former Al-Qaeda combatant in Türkiye, in which they silently trace their fights in Iraq on a map, adding the dates to determine whether they had fought each other in the past. Furthermore, the several short stories that compose the memoir are introduced by title pages adorned with topographic lines that resemble a map while featuring the names of the cities in which they are set, with locations as varied as Madrid, Neuchâtel, and London, as well as several places in the US and in the Middle East.

In the book, Ackerman is by no means the only nomadic American: both civilians and former soldiers are depicted as being scattered around the world, continuously traveling in and out of war zones. In one of the stories Ackerman describes his encounter with a fellow American soldier in Berlin, years after their first time on the battlefield, showing just how common multiple tours of duty have become: "for years the two of us deployed in and out of Iraq, then later Afghanistan, never serving on the same battlefield but always finding one another when we returned home" (139). Ackerman's wanderings throughout Europe and Asia start because of another American abroad, Matt, a former professor who wants to set up an aid company in Türkiye to underbid competing agencies providing help in Syria, whom he joins in Gaziantep at the beginning of the Syrian civil war. Other veterans also gravitate around the new conflict: "I often meet veterans of the last

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decade's war, wanderers amidst the Arab Spring's upheaval […] Our current 'professions' are often described with a shrug of the shoulders, […] as if our true profession is the unspoken one—the one we left behind" (72). Like the characters of *Missionaries*, real-life veterans are depicted by Ackerman as needing at least some proximity to a war. Vince, a veteran living in Istanbul, explicitly declares this necessity after Elliot's repeated questions as to his move to Türkiye: "in the end he settles on 'to be close to *it*.' It's the same *it* many of us need to be close to" (75, italics in the original).

Ackerman's presence at the border between Türkiye and Syria as a civilian also allows him to come face to face with many locals that have been displaced by war. Drinking tea in a Turkish border town, accompanied by Abed, a Syrian activist in the revolution, he talks to the aforementioned former jihadist—another Syrian refugee—about their motives for joining the war in Iraq. Abu Hassar has, like him, fought in a foreign country, but explains that as a Muslim, it was his duty to do so. The Syrian Civil War, however, is an entirely different thing, as he clarifies to Ackerman and Abed: "the war we fight in Syria is the worst kind […] if you lose your country, what can you do? How can you make another country?" (20). Abed and Abu Hassar are forced to leave their country for technically different reasons, but the underlying cause of their displacement is, of course, the ensuing war in their home country. War unites the displaced from Syria with those from the United States, even though the Americans in Türkiye have decided to move there of their own free will. The experience of war, however, has forever engulfed these veterans, who are inescapably attracted to it, as this passage in the section titled "Expatriates" demonstrates:

> Like Abed and his uncle, I am, and forever will be, living in a strange type of exile, an expatriate of places like Fallujah, Hit, Haditha, and others that barely dot a map. Like any expat, I am defined by a place I might return to someday, the idea that somewhere on my life's horizon is a time when I'll again walk those streets knowing my war is finished (55).

The undetermined temporal nature of the War on Terror has made homecoming impossible, so much so that—at least for Ackerman—homecoming seems to coincide not with a return to an idealized version of the United States, but is instead synonymous with a hopeful as well as improbable peace in the lands that he invaded years prior.

These regions have been, predictably, profoundly changed by the war. During a visit to Fallujah, the site of the fiercest battle between the US forces and the Iraqi insurgency, Ackerman ponders just how much the scars of the battle in which he has participated have forever left

a mark on the city: "I am searching for the marks we left behind. I see them everywhere, commingled with the marks left by others. They have become the city, both battlefield and home" (199). As Kate McLoughlin argues in *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq*, "war involves a particularly intense attachment to location (most often expressed in terms of a relationship with the land) on the part of those fighting it, an attachment that is both cognitive and emotional" (85–86), but Ackerman shows that the affective quality of the former battleground has changed after the end of the war: no longer hostile, the signs of war—inflicted by both Americans and Iraqis—render an otherwise foreign land familiar and welcoming to a former Marine.

Along with the urban modifications that it caused, the American war machine also influenced this faraway land in other, perhaps subtler ways. Shortly before his visit to Fallujah, while having coffee in a chain restaurant in Baghdad, Ackerman explains to the Iraqi photographer working with him that the reason for his abnormally large cup of coffee is to be found in the fact that the kiosk where they are having breakfast happens to be an American chain, and therefore the "medium" size coffee that he ordered is coherent with American standards. Even though Ackerman's status as an American is causing problems with the local administrators, who are reluctant to provide him with a letter of permission to enter Fallujah, US money has already infiltrated the land once again after the formal withdrawal of the armed forces from in Iraq in 2011. The economic forces that feed the war machine now control what had once been the focal point of the American invasion of Iraq, ensuring the Middle Eastern nation remains subjugated to what Deleuze and Guattari would call neocolonial tyranny (456).

The economic power that the US exerts is only rivaled by its cultural influence. In *Missionaries*, during a conversation with Lisette, Diego recalls the random American bits and pieces that surprisingly end up in faraway lands like Afghanistan, and specifically he narrates an incident where he found it necessary to shoot a target that was wearing a Van Halen t-shirt. He says: "This old US culture shit, the excess T-shirts that never got sold, they make their way to these countries like ten years too late […] And then you're looking through the scope getting all nostalgic, like, 'Yeah, man, I danced to that song with Zhanna Aronov at my prom.' And then you shoot the fucker" (318–319). Lisette is reminded of this episode when she is being kidnapped in Colombia because one of his captors is wearing a worn-down Rage Against the Machine t-shirt, another reminder of the cultural reach of what

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she calls "America's not-quite-empire which was always projecting military power across the globe" (318). The Deleuzoguattarian war machine, quite literally manifested on the kidnapper's t-shirt, is at the same time antagonist and supplier, revealing the interconnectedness of the war machine and those who oppose it. In this instance, American cultural hegemony is quickly recognized as standing for the decidedly practical political and military power that the nation exercises across the globe, one that necessarily influences even its fiercest enemies.

US imperialist practices are ubiquitous in *Missionaries*, and the very last chapter explicitly points to the issue of colonialism by including a quotation by French politician Léon Gambetta as an epigraph: "To remain a great nation or to become one, you must colonize" (389). Klay decides to conclude his book by showing Juan Pablo, a former Colombian officer, who has now moved to the UAE to work as a drone pilot for the Emirati government. Unlike my previous examples, this is not an American character that is seemingly doomed to follow the trail of death that their nation has traced around the world, but a citizen of a nation where American interests and influence have had time to alter the course of many lives. And so, a Colombian company that "had a deliberately obscure connection to an American military contracting firm" (391) hires him and catapults him to the Arabian peninsula to pilot drones and fight in the Yemeni civil war.

Here Juan Pablo becomes another cog in the global war machine fueled by American money: "Who is on our side? In our operation center we've got Americans and Israelis and Emiratis and one Colombian. We've got resupply from the United States, arms from half the globe, and if you look closely, see who is supporting this war, you will find that what sits behind us is the entire civilized world" (397–398). The title of the novel reverberates powerfully here, as the religious-like civilizing pretext of western wars is used to justify the use of unchecked and imprecise violence. Juan Pablo, evangelized by American missionaries, has in turn become a harbinger of American civilization in the Middle East and, armed with western technology against the "savages" in Yemen, he becomes a firm believer in a positivist idea of order that cannot stop for trifles like collateral damage. After ending several lives with the push of a button, Juan Pablo is satisfied of his good work, and starts reflecting on his job almost as a sacred, civilizing mission: "What mattered was the global, interconnected system that generated wealth and the technology that ultimately would determine the fate of this war, and the wars to come. That system was civilization. It was progress" (403). Swallowed by American power, Juan Pablo is—in a way—colonized not by the state, but by the military-industrial complex.

Of course, Juan Pablo is not the only character in GWOT literature whose life is upset by foreign military power. Another example of someone that is displaced due to war and American influence in his home country is Haris Abadi, an Arab American former interpreter for the US army, who, after moving from Iraq to the US, ends up traveling to Türkiye to cross the border and fight in the Syrian civil war. Haris is the protagonist of Elliot Ackerman's *Dark at the Crossing*, a novel that does not portray many American characters other than Haris, who obtained his citizenship thanks to his service as an interpreter and through the help of one of the soldiers of the unit to which he was assigned during the war. He is not the typical protagonist of an American war novel: he is an American, but he was born and raised in Iraq, he is not a soldier, but senses the urge to fight in a war in the Middle East as an independent actor. His "homecoming" to the United States is unlike any other: his "return" from Iraq coincides with his first steps in America, since he had never set foot on the continent before. As a consequence, he struggles to adapt to civilian life in the US, just like many other Americans who have experienced war in Iraq.

While it is true that much of the literature of the War on Terror takes place on the "home front," Americans who have been to war never seem quite at home in these books. Instead, they appear to be looking for a home across the world as they follow the conflicts that are constantly generated by the military-industrial complex. In the case of *Dark at the Crossing*, Jim, the sergeant who helps Haris with his citizenship papers, has previously fought in Colombia, and confesses to the protagonist that he exclusively feels at home in combat zones (78–79). According to Jim, the experience of war makes him and Haris akin to brothers who now share the same home—what he fails to account for, of course, is that as an American soldier, he was instrumental in bringing war to Haris' native land. Uprooted from his native land by an American war, Haris is doomed to participate in the same nomadic life of Klay's American "missionaries": soon after leaving Iraq for America, his newly gained "Americanness" seemingly compels him to journey from one war to another, like many veterans of the most recent wars do. The nomadism that generates the war machine is, in this case, reborn as one of its unintended consequences. As Mbembe notes, war machines attempt to "immobilize and spatially fix whole categories of people or, paradoxically, to free them as a way of forcing them to scatter over broad areas no longer contained by the boundaries of a territorial state" (86). And even if Mbembe argues that contemporary wars seem to be fought between two impossibly different groups, those who bear arms against those who do not, these narratives show

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that soldiers manifest a kind of nomadism analogous to that imposed upon noncombatants.

American GWOT literature, then, often substitutes the trope of homecoming with a perpetual hemispheric journey that keeps soldiers and civilians busy even after their first experience of war is concluded. With its depictions of multiple deployments and of the flourishing employment prospects for former members of the armed forces as private contractors that are sent around the world to participate in countless military operations, it ponders the consequences of the choice to switch to a fully professionalized army in the United States. The commercialization of global warfare that is featured prominently in these works seems to thwart the moralizing power of traditional war stories in which youths lose their innocence in the face of war as they realize that it is a horrible and pointless endeavor. War might be horrible, but it is far from pointless in the eyes of those who stand to gain from it: the war narratives analyzed here highlight its dangerously profitable aspects.

Modern wars are shown to be interconnected in a global network of conflicts that are continuously affected by militias and state actors that wield enormous amounts of geopolitical power that is tied to formidable economic interests. Those who live in the Global South are the first to suffer the mortal consequences, and those who survive are forced to embark in perilous journeys to ensure their own safety, while those who fight on any side find themselves engulfed in a never-ending quest to reach the next war. Narratives like Elliot Ackerman's *Places and Names* and *Dark at the Crossing*, as well as Phil Klay's *Missionaries* shine light on a paradoxical consequence of this globalized military market: American soldiers are brought together with the civilians who inhabit the lands were wars are fought in more than one way: not only can they never return home, but they are also "cursed" to be eternal travelers, like the refugees that wars seem to produce as a mere byproduct. Invaders and local populations, divided by agency and power, are all subjected to war's power to destroy homelands and transform individuals into perpetual wanderers.

Abstract: This paper analyzes some of the recent literature of the War on Terror—such as Elliot Ackerman's aptly titled memoir *Places and Names* (2019) and Phil Klay's ironically named novel *Missionaries* (2020)—and explores the spatial dynamics, cultural encounters, and dislocations caused by the series of interrelated conflicts that have characterized the first two decades of the twenty-first century. In doing so, I argue that these narratives highlight the spatially and temporally indefinite nature of the so-called Global War on Terror by portraying displaced civilians and by negating the tradi-

tional journey of the soldier, who is instead depicted as incessantly searching for a home in the next war. Using Achille Mbembe's characterization of contemporary warfare as characterized by *war machines* (theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*) I highlight the way in which war zones are portrayed as the economically significant and self-replicating engines of the global network of power and violence that underlies modern warfare. In this context, the characters of these stories are then depicted as nomadic individuals doomed to perpetually look for their metaphorical home, war itself, across the globe, travelling from one warzone to the next and constituting the threads of a web of smaller conflicts that take place simultaneously, in a seemingly never-ending cycle, around the world.

Keywords: GWOT, war on terror, war literature, travel, displacement, homecoming, American, veteran

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