



Janina Wierzoch

# HOME FRONTS

Contemporary War in British Literature,  
Drama, and Film

[transcript] Culture & Theory

## From:

*Janina Wierzoch*

### **Home/Fronts**

## Contemporary War in British Literature, Drama, and Film

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In recent years, the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have had an impact on the UK rivalled only by Brexit and the global financial crisis. For people at home, the wars were ever-present in the media yet remained distant and difficult to apprehend. Janina Wierzoch offers an analytical survey of British contemporary war narratives in novels, drama, film, and television that seek to make sense of the experience. The study shows how the narratives, instead of reflecting on the UK's role as invader, portray war as invading the British home. Home loses its post-Cold War sense of »permanent peace« and is recast as a home/front where war once again becomes part of what it means to be »us«.

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# 1. Introduction

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On 27 May 1997, just weeks after he assumed office, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair stated at a NATO meeting:

Mine is the first generation able to contemplate the possibility that we may live our entire lives without going to war or sending our children to war. That is a prize beyond value. ("Statement")

The statement, spoken in the context of improved post-Cold War NATO-Russian relations, was rendered particularly ironic when, just a few years later, Britain was on the brink of more than a decade of war on two fronts: in Afghanistan (2001-2014<sup>1</sup>) and in Iraq (2003-2011). Even at the time, Blair's claim of a new, peaceful "European landscape" ("Statement") revealed a "misplaced Kantian confidence in the future," Christopher Coker writes (vii; also, Mom 57). The "smug western European belief that they had 'conquered war'" ignored, if nothing else, the conflict-ridden Balkans (Ball 541). In Anna Geis, Lothar Brock, and Harald Müller's *Democratic Wars*, Christopher Daase observes that "democracies are not inherently peaceful" (74). Theories of democratic peace, Daase argues, must take into account democratic belligerence born out of "non-recognition, exclusion and enmity" towards nondemocratic states (75). The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, then, are symptomatic of a Western "culture of fear," as outlined by Coker in *War in an Age of Risk* (viii), not its contradiction. And yet, for a culture that pathologises risk-taking (Coker ix), that separates "war making and its civilian support" (Imber and Fraser 384), and believes that, in the present context, war is "'brought home' to a nation that is not itself at war" (Walklate, Mythen, and McGarry 152) war signifies a disruption, a destabilisation which calls for a response and an effort to come to terms with the realities of war.

War as a threat to British life became an issue when casualty numbers rose noticeably after 2005.<sup>2</sup> The reality of dead British soldiers returning to a "casualty-

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1 The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) withdrew in 2014; since 2015, NATO forces act in training and advisory capacities (Resolute Support Mission) (NATO).

2 After a peak of 61 operational deaths in 2003, numbers again increased in 2006 to highs in 2009 (109) and 2010 (103) (Ministry of Defence, "UK").

averse" (Chin 14) homeland was addressed in what came to be known as "the Wootton Bassett phenomenon" (Freeden 1). 'Bodies of evidence' appeared in the Wiltshire market town of Wootton Bassett after repatriation flights from the battlefields in Afghanistan and Iraq had been redirected to the nearby military airbase RAF Lyneham in the early months of 2007 (Jenkins et al. 358). On 13 April, the first of 167 convoys carrying the bodies of British servicemen killed abroad passed through Wootton Bassett (K. Davies 247). Just a few residents, led by veteran members of the Royal British Legion, gathered to honour the dead on this occasion (Freeden 3). They responded, "on behalf of the nation," as Nick Hewitt argues, "to a situation unprecedented in British history: the trickle home of the dead from an ongoing, morally questionable war of uncertain outcome" (3).

In the following months and years, the spontaneous tribute, repeated whenever the cortèges passed, evolved into a ritualised "spectacle of solemn public grief" (Jenkins et al. 360). At times, more than a thousand people attended the events—civilians and military, relatives and officials, tourists and locals (K. Davies 247). After July 2009, nation-wide news reports boosted the public perception of this "grassroots" initiative (Freeden 3) and "cement[ed] the status of the events as semi-official displays facilitated by the necessary civic and policing authorities, local businesses and social groups" (Jenkins et al. 358). Official recognition followed in 2011: Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the town would receive the title *Royal* to acknowledge its commitment to honour the war dead (Jenkins et al. 362). "[T]o propose alternative relations," Katie Davies argues, artists and photographers created counter-narratives to official and media interpretations (243; also, Walklate, Mythen, and McGarry 152). Davies's own video installation *The Separation Line* (2012) reproduced the ceremonies in size, duration, and camera perspective to offer "time and space" for reflection and reveal the "gap" between "ceremonial reality" and representation (244, 255-256). As a whole, the Wootton Bassett phenomenon contained the reality of British soldiers dying abroad in a public ritual of mourning and commemoration. The ceremonies thus exemplify a process of cultural signification and appropriation of the contemporary war experience through the exchange of competing and complementary narratives (Korte and Schneider, Introduction 4).

As "key external event[s]" of the 2000s (Bentley, Hubble and Wilson, "Fiction" 4), the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq had an impact on Britain comparable only to the effect of the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 (Chin 4). Yet, for a majority of the British population these wars never materialised as they did in the ritualised 'body count' of Wootton Bassett. The wars were waged far away, civilians were not in any real physical danger, nor was there compulsory military service as in earlier wars (M. Andrews 232). Elena V. Baraban, Stephan Jaeger, and Adam Muller argue that

for most North Americans and Europeans the contexts in which people go to war with one another appear abstract.... Not having witnessed war directly, most Westerners come to understand and respond to these recent conflicts through their representations in journalism, politics, and Internet blogs, as well as in works of art, literature, and cinema. (6)

Baraban, Jaeger, and Muller's observations confirm that, for British audiences, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq existed almost exclusively as transmedia<sup>3</sup> representations. In their virtual quality as media phenomena, the wars were as momentous and ever-present as they were distant and difficult to apprehend for people at home. Gillian Youngs argues that the wars possessed "pervasive qualities of vagueness" that distanced people "from the bigger picture" of the missions undertaken in their name (932). To make sense of war in the "age of hyperreality," to render war meaningful as contemporary experience, "narrative ... is all important," Coker notes in a nod to Jean Baudrillard (Coker 9). The military campaigns may be carried out on Afghan and Iraqi battlefields, but the cultural meaning of recent warfare is fought out elsewhere: within the British home sphere and in a variety of British texts and media.

To investigate the cultural negotiation of the British experience of recent warfare, the present project therefore looks at narrative representations of war. More specifically, the focus is on fictional narratives in British literature, drama, and film set against the backdrop of the largely concurrent campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, Britain's most recent experiences of extended warfare. The study asks how the narratives conceive of these conflicts and how war, in turn, impacts on ideas of British life and culture. Evidently, narratives of war go beyond fiction: News reports and documentary, politics and historiography, memorials and museums, even "the productions of war planners and ... the fantasies and theories of strategists" (Deer 1, 4)—they all tell stories of war. In *War and Cinema*, Paul Virilio claims: "There is no war ... without representation" (6; also, Soncini 8). Still, literature has a specific relation to war representation. In *Culture in Camouflage*, Patrick Deer writes that literary texts have "a privileged perspective on the action" due to their "emphasis on personal expression, on witness and memory, on narrating the seemingly unnarratable, and on the role played by rhetoric in war-making" (5). It is impossible even to "identify 'war itself' as an entity apart from a powerful literary tradition," Jean B. Elshtain observes (55). The assumption that through fictional narratives meaning is ascribed to complex cultural experiences is based on the premise that fiction is not antithetical to reality but the product of "acts of fictionalizing," as Wolfgang Iser writes: "The fictive ... might be called a 'transitional object,' always hovering between

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3 This study uses Werner Wolf's definition of *transmedia* as outlined by Marie-Laure Ryan: "phenomena ... whose manifestation is not bound to a particular medium" ("Narration" par. 10).

the real and the imaginary,” reproducing reality but also exceeding its limiting determinacy (20). More particularly, fictions of war introduce “imaginary positions in which conflicts can be safely explored and worked through to a potential resolution,” Graham Dawson explains in *Soldier Heroes* (20).

A comprehensive history of war representation as a context for British narratives on contemporary war exceeds the bounds of this study, even if it is reduced to literary works. But it must be noted that war has given rise to a long line of texts and genres of cultural significance, ranging from classics like the *Iliad* (McLoughlin, *Authoring*) to World War I poetry and Cold War spy fiction (Hammond; also, Peebles 4-5). Kate McLoughlin argues in *Authoring War* that the history of the representation of war in literary texts and other fictional media reveals distinct lines of continuity. First and foremost, war narratives across the centuries share the “difficulty of conveying war’s extremeness” (McLoughlin, *Authoring* 16; also, Oostdijk 355). But “even as it resists representation, conflict demands it,” McLoughlin notes (*Authoring* 7). Indeed, war has produced a plethora of literary styles, themes, and aesthetics to reflect such diverse experiences as the trench warfare of the First World War (Booth) and the anxieties of the War on Terror (K. Miller).

Rather than defining a new genre of Iraq and Afghanistan war fiction, this project explores the literary, dramatic, and film texts as contributions to the cultural negotiation of Britain at war today. Fictional narratives that deal with the recent conflicts tell their stories of war to come to terms with and render meaningful the contemporary experience of war. As fiction, they do not focus on ‘the facts’ of war but conceive of war as an experiential reality of British life. Given that war in general signifies a conflict between two parties, it comes as no surprise that research on literature of recent warfare emphasises the other side and explores them-versus-us constellations (e.g., A. de Waal, “(Sub)Versions”; Galli) or the negotiation of cultural differences (e.g., O’Gorman), including respective postcolonial implications. But these dichotomies are not the focus here. The present study is interested in the introversive ‘look at ourselves’ that characterises British narratives of recent warfare. The examined texts conceive of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq not primarily as military invasions of foreign territory by a Western alliance against terrorism but rather as an imaginary invasion of war into the British sphere of home, as a disruption that challenges cultural values, privileges, traditions.

In *War and the Cultural Construction of Identities in Britain* (2002), Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider state that any war has a profound effect on the construction of identity of those involved (Introduction 2). But more recently, Korte and Schneider go on to explain, the interest in this function of war is based on a “postmodern awareness” of the problematics of identity formation: States of war today draw attention to frictions between different levels of identity, such as communal and individual (Introduction 2-3). This renewed significance of war for what it means to be ‘us’ gives weight to the claim of the present study that, in the examined narratives,

contemporary war appears as a violent irruption into British life. This invasion of war into the sphere of cultural belonging signifies discontinuity, defamiliarisation, and extraneousness and leads to a crisis of meaning and signification at home. Further, this study claims that fictional representations of recent warfare work to dissolve the strangeness and incommunicability of war to integrate the experience into their narrative of British life. The stories create or reveal an interconnection of culture and war to work against feelings of alienation and (re)discover war as a reflection of culture on itself. As the narratives play through this process of negotiating war, what remains is a sense of vulnerability and at the same time a sort of resistance, that is, a subjection to the grand event of war as well as a sense of continuity in the face of violent conflict.

In the narratives examined in this study, the cultural self-perception of common British life under the strain of war is central. This concern links to how the history of mentalities, a branch of the French *Annales* school, thinks about cultural change. Unlike earlier approaches to cultural history, the history of mentalities does not look at high culture but is interested in the shifting “attitudes of ordinary people toward everyday life,” Patrick H. Hutton writes (“The History” 237). The approach focusses “on unspoken or unconscious assumptions, on perception, on the workings of ‘everyday thought’ or ‘practical reason,’” Peter Burke explains (162). Similarly, the present study investigates narratives that deal with ordinary people and their everyday experience of war rather than with decision-makers at the centre stage of politics. The history of mentalities is further concerned with gradual long-term developments (Hutton, “Mentalities” 801)—in that regard, Fernand Braudel’s “macrohistorical” work is paradigmatic (Andrea 605). The present study also looks at more subtle changes but does not claim to identify long-term shifts. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are too recent to argue for lasting effects as their impact competes with cultural “modes of resistance”: “the inertial power of habits of mind, conventions of speech, and visceral convictions that inhere in the common sense of tradition” (Hutton, “Mentalities” 801). More recent and future events may cast a different light on these conflicts. The present project therefore aims at identifying current strategies of dealing with and making sense of contemporary war in fictional narratives.

The argument this study makes about the narrative negotiation of war as an intruder into British life rests on an idea of culture as a sphere of belonging, or ‘home,’ confronted with an unsettling, seemingly unfamiliar sphere of war. Home, in the present context, stands for what Isabel Capeloa Gil calls “the anthropological ordering enacted by culture”; in direct contrast, war signifies an “extraordinary experience of mutual destruction” (32). Gil notes that, against the backdrop of the modern-day nation-state and its inveterate bourgeois family ideal, the experience of war calls for a reaffirmation of the domestic order of home and family (32). The present study, however, argues that, since war not only invades home but is also

allocated within the British experience in the examined narratives, home is not simply reaffirmed as it was. Rather, home is challenged by the exposition to war and transformed into a home/front<sup>4</sup>—a home sphere that integrates or rediscovers traits of war. The terminological triad of *home*, *war*, and *home/front* that is central to this project will be further specified in chapter 2.

In the present study, the theoretical underpinning for the process of negotiating home in the face of war is Yuri M. Lotman's semiotic model of culture (chapter 3.1.) or, more precisely, his idea of a dynamic semiosphere that is defined as both the product of semiosis of a given culture and the precondition of its existence and development (*Universe* 125). To begin with, home and war are assigned to the opposition of semiosphere and extrasemiotic space. Just as Bernd Hüppauf defines war as an antithesis of culture (15), the fictions examined here designate war as external and alien to British culture—eagerly disregarding Britain's active role in the actual campaigns abroad. Home, on the other hand, is in principle located at the centre of the semiosphere. Lotman, Russian semiotician and cultural historian, at one point defines home as a place of “one's own ... of safety, culture” (*Universe* 185). A crucial determinant of his model is the boundary of the semiosphere: It is, according to Lotman, a place of increased semiotic exchange (“On the Semiosphere” 208-209) or, in other words, a dynamic “mechanism” that accounts for the change of culture over time (*Universe* 136-137). For the present project, the boundary provides the infrastructure or ‘gateway’ for the semiotics of war to enter the cultural home sphere. Thus, the model is particularly suited to represent—to render visible and comprehensible—the reworking of home into a home/front. A reading of the selected works of prose literature, drama, and film along these lines facilitates an understanding of how fictional narratives contribute to the cultural conceivability of the wars, to the process of rendering war meaningful in the context of Britain today.

The narrative configuration of this negotiation of home and war varies across texts and media. By way of example, Pat Barker's short story “Subsidence,” published in the *Guardian Review* in July 2003, reveals how an interconnectedness of home and war may be established in fiction. In “Subsidence,” the primary sphere of belonging is the middle-class family of Ruth. Their home in the former coal district of County Durham stands on shaky ground: Cracks in the walls tell of the “cavernous darkness” of the disused coal mines in the ground beneath the house. On a figurative level, the broken plaster is symptomatic of the fading substance of Ruth's marriage. Her husband Matt's adulterous detachment from home and the communal subplot of the coal mining past resonate, subtly but significantly, with a third narrative thread: News reports on the war in Iraq, glossed over “like a bad

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4 The spelling *home/front* is adopted here to avoid confusion with other uses of the term *home front* (chapter 2.3.).

action movie,” claim Ruth’s attention. At first, the reports seem to be random occurrences of everyday life. But the reports are translated—in Lotman’s sense of the word—into a more invasive experience, as they interlink with the representation of family and community. Semiotic overlaps connect news reports and communal history: Because the area’s past is so vibrantly present in the mind of Ruth, the war journalists calling out “Gas! Gas! Gas!” in a television report she watches seem to echo the shouts of miners long since vanished from the community. Another passage interlinks war and family: When the falsity of the 2002 September Dossier on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (chapter 2.1.) is reported on radio, the exposure of the betrayal of the public coincides with Ruth’s discovery of her husband’s marital infidelity. The breach of trust in the private home comes to signify the waning justification of the invasion—and vice versa. By establishing these connections, some more openly than others, “Subsidence” creates a continuity between the broken family of Ruth, Durham’s lost identity as a mining community, and the disillusioned country at war that makes for an insubstantial or ‘cracked’ home/front across private, communal, and national strata.

All of the examined narratives of recent conflict bring into contact culture and warfare, but they explore different forms of connectedness. On the superordinate level of the present project, the interaction of home and war in the examined narratives is conceived as an *invasion* of war into the sphere of home. This term not only ironically inverts the fact that it was indeed British forces who intruded foreign countries (Araújo 62) and exposes the narratives as particularly self-involved representations. The term *invasion* also captures how the experience of war is understood as unsettling, overpowering, and incapacitating. On the level of the individual analyses, the narratives answer to the suspension of the order of home by negotiating a possible contact or even reconciliation between the spheres. They probe ways to render conceivable the violent experience of war that is introduced to the space of belonging. Each narrative presents this interrelation between the spheres on its own terms: The contact and subsequent interaction may be spelled out, for example, as a visual, acoustic, spatial, or associative merging of home and war spheres, as a superimposition of one sphere onto the other, as a seamless transition between home and war, as a temporary replacement of one sphere with the other, or as the build-up of a metaphoric imagery interrelating home and war. By exploring the allocation of war within the home sphere along these lines, the texts find their own ways to make sense of the recent wars.

This primary interest of the present study is complemented by a second concern: the question how different media contribute to the cultural negotiation of the wars in media-specific ways. In turn, the project also investigates how war is represented beyond the limitations of a single medium. Therefore, the study’s material basis is intermedial if only, following Werner Wolf’s categorisation, in an extracompositional sense (29). With its transmedial corpus, the study reaches across “bound-

aries between conventionally distinct media” (Wolf 19). The texts themselves are not transmedial in the sense of Henry Jenkins’s notion of transmedia storytelling as defined in *Convergence Culture* (2006).<sup>5</sup> Still, the heightened interest in the mediality and intermediality of narrative in recent scholarship informs the present study (Ryan, “Narration” par. 30). Novel, drama, and film were chosen to exemplify the diversity of media fictionalising the recent wars.<sup>6</sup> The British stage has responded quickly and with a wide variety of productions to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is also a considerable selection of film and television productions from the UK that are relevant to this study—though the respective US-American output overshadows British productions in number, public and critical recognition, and aesthetic and artistic influence (Hißnauer 183). British writers of narrative fiction took time to respond to the recent wars. Though there are a few early examples, only towards the end of the 2000s and reaching into the next decade contemporary warfare appears more frequently as a theme in the British novel.<sup>7</sup>

This study assembles media texts distinct in their mediality but also comparable on the level of the narrative: They are similar in terms of length, narrative complexity, and their propensity to create a coherent story world (e.g., Monaco 44).<sup>8</sup> For Wolf, film and drama “continue to be more or less related to literature while having developed their own profile” (22). It is the way these media are used in the cultural context that entrusts them with a function similar to that of text-based literature, even if their character and conditions have led to distinct conventions of storytelling. The three main chapters of this project thus focus on culturally established, accessible storytelling media presenting fictional—or at least decidedly fictionalised—narratives that draw on the same general subject matter: the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. To limit the choice of texts, the project stipulates that this topical reference must be made explicit: Works included here may not necessarily present combat operations or foreign battlefields, but they all share a direct and not merely figurative reference on the story level to either or both of these wars to, again, ensure comparability across media boundaries. It is the experience of the reality of conflict—the manifestations, repercussions, problematics,

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5 The examined material is not intermedial in a narrow sense, i.e., telling a story “across more than one medium” (Wolf 19). The theatre project *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* (2012) comes closest to being intermedial in that sense because its televised making-of *Theatre of War* (2012) extends the play’s story: the struggle of soldiers returning home from war permanently disabled.

6 Nonfiction (e.g., documentaries, blogs, memoirs) also contributes to the cultural negotiation of the recent wars; but nonfiction formats are not investigated in the present project.

7 For example, Andrew O’Hagan’s *The Illuminations* (2015), Barney Campbell’s *Rain* (2015), and Catherine Hall’s *Repercussions* (2014) have been published relatively recently.

8 Experimental forms of drama, for instance, are explicitly excluded in this study.

absences the wars abroad cause in the cultural home sphere—that finds expression in these narratives.

In other aspects, the selected media differ, for example, in terms of specific narrative conventions, means of storytelling, or target audiences. As Marie-Laure Ryan observes, “different media have different affordances, giving them different expressive power” (“Transmedial” 368). The respective differences spring from distinctions on various levels. In reference to Ryan, Wolf lists differences on the grounds of, for instance, mono- versus plurimediality (e.g., the text-based novel versus the audiovisual medium of film), spatio-temporal extension (e.g., prose fiction is temporal, theatre spatio-temporal), or the specific role the medium is assigned in culture (e.g., the status of theatre as high culture as opposed to television as popular culture) (38). The complex mediality of a given narrative, which this list of criteria reveals, is crucial: The medium is not just a neutral means to deliver information, the medium has an impact on the narrative content (Ryan, “Narration” par. 2). From this perspective, the narratives presented in novel, drama, and film can also be understood as three distinct cultural responses to recent warfare. The reflexivity and imagination of the novel (e.g., Ryan, “Transmedial” 368) are juxtaposed with the immediacy and affective potential of dramatic performance (e.g., Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität* 61-62) and the diversity and scope of audiovisual narration in film and television (e.g., Monaco 43, 49-50) to explore the possibilities and limitations of representing an unsettling or even traumatic war experience in different media. The novel is strictly text-based, at least in the cases relevant here, while drama and film, which use a variety of semiotic codes, are plurimedial (Wolf 27).

The choice of media for this study of contemporary fictions of war seeks to balance a diversity of media perspectives with the compatibility of the results of the media-specific analyses. To make sure that an overall conclusion can be drawn in the end, the examinations of novel, drama, and film are guided by questions that apply to all media texts. These questions or, more generally, areas of interest arise from the elaborations in the following chapters. Based on the structural and terminological framework of Lotman's notion of culture (chapter 3.1.), the present project's understanding of contemporary war (chapter 2.1.), (the British) home (chapter 2.2.), and home/front (chapter 2.3.) yield analytical categories and aspects to govern a targeted analysis of the narratives set against the backdrop of the British military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. The questions aim at the narrative construction of war, home, and home/front as constituents of the fictional negotiation of British life in times of contemporary warfare. The thesis of the present project suggests and investigates the interlinking of home and war spheres in the examined fictions. The modification of (spaces, ideas, and identities of) home in the context of war is the ultimate interest of the analyses. The specific areas of inquiry lead back to the general interest in the conflation of *front* (that is, war and

its implications) and *home* (British culture) into a modified space of belonging that is captured in the term *home/front*.

While this is the argumentative guideline of the present study, the three main chapters—which focus on novel (chapter 4.), drama (chapter 5.), and film (chapter 6.) respectively—are both synoptic and analytic. For one thing, the chapters introduce and examine the media-specific corpora of British works set against the backdrop of contemporary war in Afghanistan and/or Iraq that were identified in preparation for this project. Within these exploratory subchapters, selected texts are analysed more closely to sound out the diversity of narrative home/fronts in contemporary fictional media from the UK. Though on practical grounds most of the readings must be relatively brief, this approach offers the possibility to work out media-specific emphases that emerge beyond the individual texts. For another thing, the second part of each chapter further substantiates the proposed thesis of this study by presenting a more focussed in-depth analysis of a single text from the respective field. These close readings exemplify the affinities of the medium: Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here* (2011) will illustrate the construction of the home/front in the text-based narrative of a novel (chapter 4.2.); the dramatic construction of a war-torn home identity is exemplified by Simon Stephens's *Motortown* (2006) (chapter 5.2.); and the television serial *Occupation* (2009) will be the object of the more detailed examination of the home/front in a film narrative (chapter 6.2.). In terms of content and setting, for instance, *Occupation* devotes much attention to the action in the war zone; *Motortown* shows a pronounced interest in the return of the soldier to a small-scale domestic setting; and the novel *Wish You Were Here* is particularly focussed on the inner world of its protagonist. In the concluding chapter, the results from the analyses will be consolidated to come to a transmedial understanding of the cultural response to contemporary warfare in British fictional media.

## 2. Contexts and State of Research

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Much of the production of and research on British war literature and media today is concerned with older wars. The World Wars in particular “have become ... prosthetic memories,” as Maggie Andrews observes; their narratives are so excessively repeated that they are available as “intimate ... memories” for anyone (234). The continued relevance of the Great War (1914-1918) is not least exemplified by popular drama series such as *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015), in which World War I is, once again, confirmed as a “turning point” for the development of national identity, as a moment of drastic cultural change (Baena and Byker 262, 265). In *Cultural Heritage of the Great War in Britain* (2013), Ross J. Wilson confirms that this war “still haunts modern society” (1). And the same holds true for the Second World War (1939-1945): Recent cultural production, ranging from blockbusters like Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk* (2017) to academic studies such as Petra Rau’s *Long Shadows* (2016), still upholds World War II as a cultural reference point for present-day Britain.

More recent experiences of war are yet to be conceived in culture. The *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth Century British and American War Literature* (2012), for example, deliberately “stop[s] short of the wars in the Middle East, in the Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan, for that story is still being written and told” (Piette and Rawlinson, Introduction 3). When research does address the cultural representation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, they are usually embedded in one of the defining discourses of the early twenty-first century: America’s (Global) War on Terror(ism). This campaign, “a representation of events, a rhetorical construction, a series of stories about 9/11 and about America’s place in the world” (Holloway 4), determines the public, literary, and academic perception of the military missions waged in its name. Book-length publications in this field include David Holloway’s *9/11 and the War on Terror* (2008), Daniel O’Gorman’s *Fictions of the War on Terror* (2015), and Susana Araújo’s *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and the War on Terror*. As the present study focusses on British representations, it is important to note that “the lion’s share of [academic and popular press] literature is focussed on the experiences of the United States,” as Warren Chin notes in *Britain and the War on Terror* (2013) (3). For obvious reasons, 9/11 and the War on Terror are publicly discussed, fictionalised, and theorised mainly as American concerns. Besides, themes like terrorism, secu-

rity, trauma, or cultural differences are also much more prominent in fiction and research than the military side of the War on Terror, for example, in Katharina Donn's *A Poetics of Trauma after 9/11* (2017) or Tim Gauthier's *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* (2015). Much is still to be said about Afghanistan and Iraq as cultural experiences of war and about the literary, dramatic, and cinematic reactions they inspired, especially if the focus is on the cultural context of the UK.

The exclusively British perspective of the present project concerns authorship and production context as well as narrative setting, principal characters, and general focus of the narratives. That is, this study is interested in stories that (re)create British life-worlds and experiences in the face of military warfare abroad. Texts and media from other cultural contexts may have also had an impact on the British reception of the recent wars. Especially American representations, most certainly blockbuster productions like Kathryn Bigelow's Academy Award-winning film *The Hurt Locker* (2008), received their fair share of attention from UK audiences. Suman Gupta also observes "a heightened interest" in Middle Eastern poetry during the Iraq War, both in Britain and in the United States (16). Still, such material must be the object of another study. The present project's corpus alone covers more than a decade of UK writing and filmmaking. Indeed, the production of contemporary British literature and media dealing with the recent wars provides a wealth of material that substantiates an investigation of specifically British responses to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And even if there is extensive research on corresponding US narratives, insights gained from studies of material from the United States can never compensate for an examination of the British narratives, for "media and war are handled differently by different nations" (Schubart 5). Chin observes that "the British experience as an occupying army proved to be very different to that which emerged in the American area of operations" (106). Thus, even if Britain and the US were allies in Afghanistan and Iraq and share cultural and political affinities, they also have distinct cultural, political, and historical perspectives on these conflicts.

So far, scholarship on the literary and cultural representation of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars has rarely focussed on British material exclusively. Individual works from the UK are, however, included in studies on 9/11 and the War on Terror with an American or international outlook. Some publications seek to balance perspectives from both sides of the Atlantic, for example, Gupta's *Imagining Iraq: Literature in English and the Iraq Invasion* (2011) or Stephen Lacey and Derek Paget's *The 'War on Terror': Post-9/11 Television Drama, Docudrama and Documentary* (2015). Kristine A. Miller's *Transatlantic Literature and Culture after 9/11* (2014) also addresses texts from the US and Britain, but the essays in her volume again rather deal with the theme of terrorism and only touch upon the wars as part of the War on Terror narrative. Gupta's work comes closest to the present study, because it also takes a transmedial approach and deals with literature of the war in Iraq in particular, not the wider War on Terror. And though Gupta writes about

English-language literature in general, as a UK-based scholar, he appears to be particularly aware of British texts. Other than the present study, however, Gupta's project only looks at material produced between 2003 and 2005. In addition, Gupta has a rather specific objective: to investigate how literature on the Iraq invasion provides insight into "the recent and current condition of literature" (13)—whereas the present study focusses on the current condition of culture as it emerges in literature, drama, and film.

Much of the relevant research literature has a transmedial perspective. Apart from the studies by O'Gorman and Araújo, few works focus primarily on the novel—and such studies, again, rarely deal with texts focussing on the military campaigns. Film studies, possibly due to the strong tradition of the war film genre, more frequently focus on the military side of the War on Terror. Martin Barker's *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films* (2011) analyses more than twenty works but only includes two films from a British production context—one of which, Nick Broomfield's *Battle for Haditha* (2007), deals with a group of US Marines rather than UK troops. Rikke Schubart, Fabian Virchow, Debra White-Stanley, and Tanja Thomas's *War Isn't Hell It's Entertainment* (2009) looks at contemporary visual representations of war more generally. Following James Der Derian's *Virtuous War* (2001), Schubart and her colleagues are interested in the long-standing entanglement of war, media, and entertainment industries (Schubart 2). In the context of 9/11 and facilitated by digitisation, the "morphing [of these industries] into one another" spread far beyond the US, Schubart explains, blurring the boundaries of war, media, and entertainment on a global scale (4). Next to its focus on film, Stacey Peebles's *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq* (2011) also includes other media but, again, deals with an American perspective on war. Still, Peebles's work stresses the significance of the soldier figure to conceive of contemporary war as lived experience rather than virtual representation (if, remarkably enough, *in* representation) that also holds true for the present project. Studies on post-9/11 film occasionally include a separate chapter on Iraq War films, such as Douglas Kellner's *Cinema Wars* (2010). As a matter of fact, if recent warfare is addressed in fiction or research, Iraq as the more contentious conflict of the two is usually focussed (Peebles 2). German scholarship, such as Carsten Gansel and Heinrich Kaulen's *Kriegsdiskurse in Literatur und Medien nach 1989* (2011) and Christa Karpenstein-Eßbach's *Orte der Grausamkeit* (2011), expectably focus on other recent wars, such as the Balkans or a variety of smaller conflicts. Scholarship on the contribution of British theatre to the negotiation of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is comparatively numerous. Plays written and produced in reference to these wars are addressed by Sara Soncini in her study *Forms of Conflict* (2015), by Ariane de Waal in *Theatre on Terror* (2017), and by Julia Boll in *The New War Plays* (2013), to name but a few. The relevance of British drama in this field is also reflected in more

general studies on contemporary theatre which, when addressing documentary drama, almost invariably include plays that deal with the wars.<sup>1</sup>

Texts and media of contemporary war are of course also addressed in shorter academic articles. These will be taken into consideration in the analyses later on. Still, some of the works examined here have not been explored in research yet. As the brief overview above reveals, much remains to be said about the British response—in fiction and across media boundaries—to the contemporary experience of the wars waged in Afghanistan and Iraq.

## 2.1. War

This project considers texts that openly reference Britain's recent campaigns in Afghanistan and/or Iraq. This is not to say that all material necessarily represents combat action or even military operations more generally. For Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers, war is essentially defined by “the use of force” (“Fighting is what defines war”) and characterised by “contention” based on “reciprocity” (Introduction 6-7)<sup>2</sup>; and Susan Sontag calls war “a huge tapestry of actions” (“Regarding the Torture”). The present project adopts a yet more inclusive understanding of the term: A culture's notion and perception of war is constituted as a nexus of events, debates, and experiences that includes but also exceeds military action. War is constituted at the intersection of military action, discourse, and historico-cultural conception, Hüppauf confirms in *Was ist Krieg?*, his monograph on the cultural history of war (24). Paul Virilio adds that war is not determined by “territorial, economic or other material victories” but rather by the appropriation of immaterial “perceptual fields” (7). In other words, war is a fight over ways of seeing and thinking.

This is important because the invasion of Iraq, at least from a conventional point of view, does not qualify as war: The military action of the US-led coalition was not fully regulated by international law, nor was military power distributed equally among the parties involved in the fighting (Gupta 19, 141; also, Youngs 929); the Iraq War was an asymmetrical conflict (Chin 143). For Gupta, using the term *war* rather than *invasion* detracts attention from the ethical dilemmas of the deployment: *War* denotes a confrontation of largely equal opponents and conceals the disruption of civil spheres that the term *invasion* implies (141). Moreover, “in the civil sphere,” Gupta notes, “the invasion was ... understood as reflexively *within*

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1 For more details regarding the state of research on British narratives of contemporary war in prose fiction, stage plays, film and television, see the respective chapters in this study.

2 Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers's list also includes “a degree of intensity and duration,” combatants who do not act “in a private capacity,” and some “aim beyond fighting itself” (Introduction 7).

the home-fronts and indeed *on* the home-fronts in various ways” (103-104). Thus, when the narratives examined here conceive of the wars as invasions into the home sphere, they ironically invert the fact that it was the British forces who intruded into foreign spheres (Araújo 62).

The actual narrative configuration of war will be addressed in the textual analyses of the present project: How do the novels, dramas, and films conceive of war? Which aspects and issues of the “amorphous amalgamate[s] of belligerent actions” (Boll 1) in Afghanistan and Iraq do they address? Which facets of war clash with the British home sphere? And which familiar cultural codes and images are used to make sense of war, to inscribe it into the narrative of home? But before such questions can be addressed, some context is necessary regarding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in general and the British role within and perspective on these conflicts in particular.

Over the past decades, theorists have dealt with a perceived change in the nature of warfare. As Boll contends, contemporary conflict, blurring the lines between “frontline and homeland, ... war and peace,” does not follow the rules of twentieth-century state warfare (1). A key aspect of theories of post-1989 warfare, such as Herfried Münkler’s or Mary Kaldor’s new wars theories, is the asymmetry between state and nonstate actors. In *The Changing Character of War*, Strachan and Scheipers note that “part of the problem with much operational thought in the 1990s was that it had forgotten that the enemy has a vote and that his responses might be ‘asymmetrical’ or even unpredictable” (Introduction 7). William S. Lind’s fourth generation warfare school pays specific attention to the effects of this asymmetry. Lind takes into consideration new weapons and tactics, “including terrorism and immigration,” that make strategies of interstate warfare redundant (Chin 9-10). Some literary scholarship on contemporary wars, like Boll’s *The New War Plays* or Rasmus Greiner’s film study *Die neuen Kriege im Film* (2012), conceive of Afghanistan and Iraq as new wars in this sense and claim that they call for new representational approaches (Greiner, “Die neuen Kriege” 9).

The present project is not interested in classifying its material according to such concepts from political or social sciences. This study rather looks at the recent conflicts as cultural experiences of war—regardless of whether the military deployments qualify as war in terms of political studies, international law, or other disciplines and irrespective of whether they challenge traditional notions of war. What matters is that the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq were publicly represented and perceived as wars in the British cultural sphere. Indeed, Gupta notes that the invasion of Iraq “was surrounded so comprehensively by talk of war that it appeared to become war” (20)—especially in the literary imagination (141). And it is in this sense that the present project speaks of wars and warfare.

In practical terms, war in this study refers to a number of events, contexts, and debates that determined the perception of the conflicts in Britain. It was the

militarised American rhetoric in the aftermath of 9/11 that had set the scene for the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq (Holland 2). And these missions would, for more than a decade, be the figurehead of the proclaimed War on Terror (Chin 3-4). The campaigns were (and are) received within the discursive frame of the War on Terror. Yet, especially from a British perspective, the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are not to be understood as manifestations of this figurative war alone. In fact, Britain looks back at a long line of military campaigns on Afghan battlegrounds, dating back as far as 1839. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, Western states had intervened for decades, if not centuries, and both had their distinct contexts, conditions, and problematics. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Afghanistan had appeared as “the logical primary target” for the US and its allies as the Taliban-ruled country provided a safe haven for terrorist organisations (Yorke 360). But Iraq was a highly controversial objective. The 2003 invasion of Baghdad was also not the first intervention of Western troops on these battlegrounds. It was preceded by the UN-mandated Gulf War of 1990/91 and by Operation Desert Fox, a 1998 bombing campaign conducted by US and British forces to ‘remind’ Iraq of UN regulations (Chin 79). Some of the examined war narratives take note of this historical depth and of UK military history more generally; lessons of war history are weaved, for instance, into Owen Sheers’s play *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* (2012) and Gregory Burke’s *Black Watch* (2006) (chapter 5.1.3.).

In early 2002, the US began to make efforts to resume military action in Iraq (Holland 135). The invasion in March 2003 was disputed, to say the least. For quite a while, the “unwinnable folly in Iraq” (Sontag, “Regarding the Torture”) directed attention away from the less controversial engagement in Afghanistan. Not before 2009, for instance, when *The Great Game: Afghanistan*, a series of playlets, ran at London’s Tricycle Theatre (Kent 7), did the British stage react to this earlier conflict. On the operational side, the British had already increased their rebuilding efforts in Helmand province three years before and thus much earlier than the Americans (Chin 143, 157). But the British efforts were thwarted by the inadequate assessment of Taliban resistance: Fatality numbers among British troops rose sharply after 2006 (Chin 144-145, 157). In combination, the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq revived, once more, an experience of war in Britain that seemed to have passed away along with the twentieth century: long-lasting conflicts, costly in terms of materials input as well as health and life of British troops. Western forces quickly succeeded in disempowering the targeted regimes in both theatres of war but then struggled for years as post-invasion peacekeeping and rebuilding were hampered by prolonged low intensity insurgencies (Strachan 4). Since then, other strategies for the use of military force, such as targeted special forces operations, were adopted to take the War on Terror into the next decade (Chin 4-5). Anne-Marie Slaughter even hypothesises that Afghanistan and Iraq might end “boots-on-the-grounds” interstate warfare altogether (Fidler et al. 5; also, Chin 4).

Both wars were initiated and dominated by the US. Britain played “a not insignificant but essentially junior role” in the alliance (Yorke 407). Its New Labour government claimed to be on an equal footing with America, but Ambassador Sir Christopher Meyer expressed his concern that Britain failed to realise its influence in Washington (81) and sacrificed its national interests (Chin 77). The US welcomed the British contribution (Keegan 172) but emphasised that they could defeat Baghdad on their own if necessary (Chin 8). It was Blair’s government that relied on “collective security and the ‘special relationship’” with the US (Cawkwell 13; also, Fairclough); and it was believed that the PM’s “personality and leadership style” led to Britain’s participation in the Afghan and Iraqi campaigns, a position Stephen B. Dyson corroborates (289). Though others, such as James de Waal, disagree (vi; also, Johnson, Introduction 8), the wars were commonly seen as “Blair’s wars” (Kampfner) or “Blair’s Vietnam” (Danchev, “Tony” 189). In fictional media, Blair is repeatedly brought to life to examine his role in the wars. According to Stella Bruzzi, satirical portrayals in particular utilise the PM’s “performative ambiguity” (134). Tracing the formation of New Labour’s foreign policy before 9/11, Jack Holland emphasises Blair’s claim of British leadership on the global stage if “not as a superpower” then at least “as a pivotal power” (60). Invoking “romanticised images of a glorious imperial past,” Blair appealed to postimperial sensibilities that rested on ideas of insular exceptionalism, freedom, and independence, Holland notes (59; 64). Blair also presented the UK as a “transatlantic bridge,” seeking to consolidate pro-US and pro-European positions that, until then, had been seen as mutually exclusive (Holland 56). And the PM put forth the notion of a British obligation to the international community, promoting and rationalising interventionism on moral grounds (Holland 58). That Britain ought to be a “force for good” became a “Blairite mantra” (Danchev, *On Art* 222).

Only weeks after Blair’s pledge on 11 September 2001 to “stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends” (“Blair’s”; also, Yorke 364), British troops were sent to Afghanistan. At the time, there was little controversy about this campaign, which “had all the prospects of being a ‘good’ war, with a high level of international legitimacy,” Edmund Yorke explains, and “firmly in line with Blair’s much-trumpeted 1997 pronouncement of an ‘ethical dimension’ to Labour foreign policy” (365). But Blair’s belief in the “tenacious myth” of a special bond with the US (Jon Cook 22) soon committed Britain to another war effort, which few of the Western nations were willing to support: preemptive regime change in Iraq. There was considerable opposition to this war in politics and news media (Keegan 176)—and among the populace. On 15 February 2003, an unprecedented number of people gathered in London and Glasgow to march against military action in Iraq, joined by millions in coordinated events around the world (Tarrow viii). The rallies provide the subject matter for a number of texts and media, such as Alison Miller’s novel *Demo* (2005) (chapter 4.1.1.). In spite of the public outcry, a small majority of 54 percent backed

the war effort at the time of invasion—a fact often ignored as general disapproval set in afterwards (Dahlgreen). In the 2016 Chilcot Report, the board of inquiry into the government’s policy on Iraq concluded that Blair had “overestimated his ability to influence US decisions on Iraq” and had committed himself to war “before the peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted. Military action at that time was not a last resort” (Chilcot 1).

Despite the British expertise in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, UK military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq failed “at the grand strategic level” (Chin 9, 12). And the decisions on the levels of politics and military strategy also had an impact on the perception, experience, and representation of the wars on social and individual levels. In this sense, the political and military domains affect the examined fictional narratives, even though the stories centre on those not in power, such as civilians and lower-ranking soldiers. For instance, troops were not granted recommended intervals of rest and recuperation (Chin 37). Such resource problematics (Chin 13) are reflected in the narratives of war examined here in the prolonged absences of serving family members from home and in the frustration of soldiers in the field.

There was also an intense debate about the ethics and justification of going to war. A dark cloud was cast on the war in Iraq in particular when the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib by US forces became public. Similar cases involving British soldiers also came to light—with far reaching consequences for more than those directly involved (Kerr 402). As the judgement of the soldiers’ actions blended with the discussion of “the rights and wrongs of the war,” nothing less than “the legitimacy of British involvement in Iraq, the responsibility of the British Government, and the future of the military justice system” were at stake, Rachel Kerr argues (402). The incidents called into question the moral aspiration of the British presence abroad, which Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins had captured in an “inspiring eve-of-battle speech” that came to public attention (Keegan 167)—and thus had an impact “far beyond its immediate sociocultural context” (Butt, Lukin, and Matthiessen 276):

I know of men who have taken life needlessly in other conflicts. I can assure you they live with the mark of Cain upon them.... You will be shunned unless your conduct is of the highest—for your deeds will follow you down through history. (Collins)

The moral guidance of this speech is, for instance, reflected in the television film *The Mark of Cain* (2007) (chapter 6.1.4.) or the short film series *10 Days to War* (2008), in which Collins’s rhetoric is reenacted with some pathos by actor Kenneth Branagh (chapter 6.1.2.).

The ethical dimension of the wars is closely linked to the debate on the nature of the visual image and the ‘ethics of empathy’ that was sparked by the Abu Ghraib pictures. Much of this debate refers to Susan Sontag’s thoughts on the function

of photographic images of war and disaster in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) and to Judith Butler's *Frames of War* (2009), which discusses the link between representation and the grievability of life. "The Western memory museum," Sontag claims, "is now mostly a visual one" ("Regarding the Torture"). The history of the 2000s, the decade of the recent wars, "can be summoned by iconic images," Jeanne Collieran confirms (14). The ethics of representation are addressed in a number of the examined fictions. Pat Barker's novel *Double Vision* (2003) even refers explicitly to Sontag's book (chapter 4.1.2.).

The visibility of the wars is directly linked to their extensive media representation. Citing Douglas Kellner, Collieran argues that the media is the contemporary "site of culture," the place of power and social control (19). This media dominance changes "the relationship between war and society," Mark Imber and Trudy Fraser note in reference to Colin McInnes: Wars safely presented on television neatly separate the civilian viewer from the professional combatant in the field (384). At the same time, new communications technologies give power to media audiences to impact on foreign policy, Imber and Fraser add (384). The significance of media technology and representation features prominently in the examined narratives—notably in the text-based medium of the novel, for example, in Ali Smith's *The Accidental* (2005) (chapter 4.1.5.). Attention will be paid to how the texts reflect the immaterial presence of war as an experience for a mass audience in the sheltered space of home.

A number of "headline events" (Hubble, Tew, and Wilson x)—many of which took place in the UK rather than on foreign battlefields—characterise the British experience of the wars more specifically. In fiction, these events function as domestic manifestations of the distant, intangible conflicts. The massive antiwar protests in early 2003, for example, made the headlines in the run-up to the Iraq War. As narrative events, the protests provide occasion to address key issues and events of this phase, such as the doubtful legal basis for an invasion of Iraq (Independent), the efforts to procure support at the UN, and the vote for war in the House of Commons in March 2003 (Chin 90). Of critical importance for the British experience of the Iraq War was also the September Dossier, a report issued in 2002 that claimed Iraq secretly possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In a parliamentary debate in March 2003, Blair used the arguments of this report to justify a preemptive strike against Iraq (Bentley, Hubble, and Wilson, "Timeline" 254-255), disregarding objections from UN weapons inspector Hans Blix (Lewis 298). Eventually, Blix would call the Iraq War "illegal" (Holloway 164). In May 2003, just weeks after the invasion, BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan reported that the dossier had been "sexed up" (BBC, "How BBC"; also, Keegan 213-214). British UN weapons expert David Kelly was quickly identified as his source. Kelly's suspicious death in July "provoked a full-blooded political crisis in the United Kingdom" but was eventually rated a suicide in the Hutton Inquiry, which also acquitted the government

of wilful misinformation and undue interference (Keegan 216). In fiction, drama, and film, the affair is frequently addressed, for instance in the television film *The Government Inspector* (2005) (chapter 6.1.2.).

Another event that dominated the headlines for weeks on end were the coordinated attacks on London's public transport system in July 2005, in which 52 people were killed and many more injured. In the style of 9/11, they came to be known as 7/7. In the public mind, the attacks were linked directly to the British military overseas engagement in the War on Terror (Chin 37). But scholars also see a link between warfare and terrorism. Mary Kaldor writes in *New and Old Wars* (2006): "The terrorism experienced in places such as New York, Madrid or London, as well as in Israel or Iraq, can be understood as a variant of new strategy—the use of spectacular, often gruesome, violence to create fear and conflict" (9). Euphoria over the acceptance of London's bid for the 2012 Olympics only the day before was blighted by the bombings, which fuelled domestic opposition to the wars (Holland 172).

The fact that UK forces were technologically not as well-equipped as their ally also came to public attention. Yet, the British were seen as particularly capable in special operations, counterinsurgency, and urban warfare and were therefore put in charge of Iraq's second largest city Basra (Keegan 175; also, Ball 554). In the television series *Occupation*, for instance, Basra's labyrinthine streets provide an important setting in one of the narrative threads (chapter 6.2.). Ostensibly, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were successful: Basra was taken quickly by the British (Keegan 175) and the regime in Kabul was toppled within weeks. But commenting on the military campaigns, Colleran explains: "For a decade, the War on Terror was successful in ways that mattered little ... and unsuccessful in ways that mattered most, wreaking lasting damage on [the homeland]" (13-14). The invasions, Yorke points out, soon proved to be hollow victories, undermined by "a continued fallacious emphasis upon fighting a war" rather than building peace (361).

As the occupations dragged on, Britain operated for years on two fronts when its forces were not laid out for such demands (Chin 37). The situation of the "badly overstretched ... forces" was aggravated by the "tight budget" granted for the unpopular missions (Chin 37). Troops complained about deficient and inadequate equipment (Meek, "Off Target"), which also provides a source of disillusionment for the soldiers in the film *The Patrol* (2013) (chapter 6.1.1.). Moreover, casualty numbers, low at first (Keegan 182), increased noticeably when, in the post-invasion phase, insurgent groups in both theatres of operations switched to a strategy of planting "deadly roadside IEDs (improvised explosive devices) to kill British and Coalition troops" (Yorke 373). The IED emerged as the real and symbolic faceless threat of the post-invasion insurgencies. In *Playing the Great Game* (2012), Yorke holds responsible UK strategists in particular for not reacting adequately to the enemy because of the country's "historical experience in this region" (407). Yorke argues that "Government failures, if not outright betrayal" allowed post-invasion Afghanistan to

become a death trap for British soldiers and therefore led to a low point in troop morale (409; also, Chin 12). The end of combat missions and the withdrawal of troops in 2009 and 2014 respectively, save those in training and advisory capacities (Ministry of Defence, “Britain”), as well as the 2016 Chilcot Report set a tentative end to these wars. Full closure, real or perceived, is unlikely to follow anytime soon, for both Afghanistan and Iraq remain sources of unrest (Luckhurst, “In War Times” 214). In August 2017, the US announced to once again increase their troops in Afghanistan and to continue their presence indefinitely, rescinding earlier statements of complete withdrawal (Nakamura and Phillip). As Yorke concludes, “there is along [sic] way to go” (413).

Such long-term military engagements as those in Afghanistan and Iraq may seem less surprising if one follows Julia Boll’s observation that, over the past decades, war “has become the status quo and the main force for the organization of society” (1). Yet, this observation clashes with the fact that, at the same time, “risk aversion is now so entrenched in the collective consciousness that we tend to write off almost all risk-taking as abnormal, or pathological” (Coker ix). Within the analyses later in the present study, attention will be paid to this tension and to how home is characterised through the explicit or implicit construction of an exterior, unfamiliar, nonsemiotic space of war, the polar complement that shapes home *ex negativo*. Still, historically speaking, war is the rule. In the context of British contemporary consumer culture war is something (artificially) externalised—or rebranded: Democracies’ “practical security needs” further coalitions such as NATO, which after the dissolution of the Eastern bloc readjusted its attention to less tangible threats (e.g., terrorism) and adopted a strategy of “proactive risk management” (Daase 86-87). For Sara Soncini, the presence of war following 9/11 has by now transformed war, once again, “from a state of exception into the new *modus vivendi*” (3). And Boll notes that “Western society defines itself increasingly via its involvement in these wars” (2; also, 34). But how, if at all, do popular fictional narratives deal with the fact that war might be actually part of culture? How do they inscribe war into their image of culture?

To understand Britain’s relation to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, historical contexts must be taken into account. British culture is shaped by an awareness of its former global power—by now, either lost or transformed (Ball 539). In some parts, regional histories of warfare have created centuries-old military identities (Keegan 168), prominently staged in *Black Watch* (chapter 5.1.3.). The Anglo-Afghan conflict reaches as far back as the early nineteenth century. But the industrial-scale World Wars are the fallback level for the cultural conception of war, even though the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq by no means “replicate” their conditions (Imber and Fraser 384). The World Wars have established persistent tropes of commemoration as well as ideas of the British home front braving the Blitz and defending the homeland against invasion from outside (Youngs 926). Fictions of the recent wars,

such as Catherine Hall's novel *The Repercussions* (2000) (chapter 4.1.3.), still draw on these epochal wars to conceive of ways to think about the experience of conflict today. Younger conflicts, such as the Suez Crisis of 1956, the Troubles in Ireland, the 1982 defence of British rule on the Falkland Islands, and NATO peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, are referred to less frequently.

For Victoria M. Basham, "the UK is more a welfare than a warfare state" (*War* 21). But the culture of war remembrance, substantially shaped during the Great War of 1914 to 1918, is of heightened relevance in the context of prolonged warfare after 2001; the Wootton Bassett ceremonies (chapter 1.) make use of this tradition. A war memorial dedicated to the soldiers killed in the World Wars is "a standard feature" of British towns and villages; and today, they carry the names of servicemen who died in Iraq and Afghanistan as well (Imber and Fraser 384). Usually placed in the communal centre, the memorials reference London's own central war memorial, the Cenotaph in Whitehall. As Bill Niven explains, the memorials "operate ... at the nexus of politics and culture" (39). In the context of the First World War, the monuments came to express a shared national grief, epitomised in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, rather than the political triumph of the victor (Niven 39-40). In Britain, the memorials have been used for spontaneous expressions on the communal level, though Niven cautions against reading these as truly democratised forms of remembrance (40). The case of Royal Wootton Bassett exemplifies how spontaneous forms of war remembrance attract a degree of political control and appropriation. The central ritual of British war commemoration are the country-wide ceremonies on Remembrance Sunday, which were introduced to remember Armistice Day on 11 November 1918 (Imber and Fraser 385). Imber and Fraser's empirical study shows that despite antiwar sentiments in the context of the Iraq War (388) such traditional forms of remembrance are still relevant in the present-day context of Afghanistan and Iraq (394). In Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here*, for example, the date and the annual rituals take a prominent position in the life of the protagonist (chapter 4.2.).

In conclusion, the representation and negotiation of the recent wars in contemporary culture not only draw upon a complex network of current debates, discourses, and events of war at home and abroad. The cultural responses also refer back to previous experiences and narratives of war, that is, to earlier notions of war that still prevail in the British home sphere.

## 2.2. Home

The cultural home sphere of Britain and its reaction to recent warfare in fiction is the focus of this study. The examined material is both a product of this sphere and centrally concerned with British life and culture. Rather than directing atten-

tion to the hostile environment of enemy country and culture, the wars bring on a crisis at home that provokes a reflection of home on itself and draws attention to home culture and self-understanding. In fact, occasional statements in reviews and analyses that stories from this study's corpus are "not really about war" (M. Barker 112; also, e.g., Lacey 4) may be attributed to this focus on home. As Gunther Gebhard, Oliver Geisler, and Steffen Schröter note in their introduction to *Heimat* (2007), the contact with abroad—with the alien, external, and unfamiliar—renders visible and raises to a level of reflexivity the meaning of home (17). Situations of crisis, more particularly, provoke a moment of inquiry into the condition of self and society that interlinks the global and the everyday (Horton, *Contemporary* 3). The theme of war, implicating politics and state action on an international level, immediately suggests the idea of a national home(land). But it is a wider cultural community, not just the political community of the nation, that the present study is interested in. Cultural and national affiliation overlap but are not synonymous and, as Rosemary M. George notes in *The Politics of Home* (1996), fiction usually privileges representations of home over negotiations of national identity: "while the nation is the object and subject of nationalist narratives, literary narratives are more centrally concerned with the idea of home" (11-12).

Any definition of collective identity condenses a "living pluralism" and "actual inequality" to the idea of a unified collective, as Benedict Anderson notes in *Imagined Communities* (7). Though he focusses on nation and nationality, Anderson asserts that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (6). In other words, community is constituted as the idea of a unified collective in the minds of its members "regardless of the actual inequality" (Anderson 7). Similarly, in the present study, the term *home* is used to capture an idea of British belonging and self-understanding based on unity rather than plurality of British culture and society. The creation of unity and continuity for something that is, in reality, diverse and discontinuous is also to be found in Yuri Lotman's model of culture: The semiosphere is "at the same time unequal yet unified, asymmetrical yet uniform" (*Universe* 131). As Edna Andrews explains, it "gives a name to the sense of continuity peoples often feel about themselves and others as groups that are defined by an infinite number of ever-changing, dynamic discontinuities" (175). Home, as it is used in the present project, brings together such ideas of individual, familial, communal, national, cultural membership or affiliation. The term is chosen for denoting spheres of inclusion on a scale ranging from homeland to 'hearth and home,' from sense of self to in-group identity and national community, from citizenship to the place of origin and the dwelling place.<sup>3</sup>

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3 The Oxford English Dictionary defines *home* as "[a] dwelling place; a person's house or abode; the fixed residence of a family ...; the seat of domestic life and interests"; "a private house or residence considered merely as a building"; "[t]he place where one lives or was brought up,

As a concept, home has been theorised by various disciplines for different purposes. According to Shelley Mallett's "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature" (2004), home is a "multidimensional concept" that addresses "people's complex and diverse lived experience" (64). And the seemingly reasonable claim that home "immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection" (George 1) only holds true within a specific context. Mallett concludes that the term *home* is "a repository for complex, inter-related and ... contradictory socio-cultural ideas about people's relationship with one another, especially family, and with places, spaces, and things" (84). Any definition of the term must necessarily be limited as it serves particular interests.

The present study's use of the term *home* with its strong reference to a concrete (dwelling) place goes hand with an emphasis on physical spaces and places. Both the focus on home space(s) and the use of Lotman's spatial model place the study in the context of theories of space. Since the so-called *spatial turn*, proclaimed in Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) and elaborated in *Thirdspace* (1996), categories of space have received much attention in critical thinking across the disciplines (Winkler, Seifert, and Detering 254; also, Günzel). The focus of the present study on British home culture also implies the relevance of meaningful actual spaces and places (e.g., London as centre). Yet, it is only within the examined fictions that real-life home spaces play a role here. That this study stays firmly within the realm of represented space is characteristic of literary and cultural studies perspectives on space, as Kathrin Winkler, Kim Seifert, and Heinrich Detering explain; this distinguishes most literary approaches to space from the spatial turn's original interest in bringing together real and imagined space (259). Because notions of space are introduced via a primary interest in the narrative (imagined) renegotiation of culture, this project does not discuss at length the complex field of spatial theories beyond Lotman's model of the semiosphere (chapter 3.1.) and, if briefly, Michel Foucault's heterotopia (chapter 3.3.).

Home seems to be a universal concept, if only in the sense that everyone seems to have some understanding of home. Chosen for its inclusiveness, the term is at the same time elusive; it cannot be pinned down to a substantial definition beyond the tentative proposition that home apparently always comprises a "pattern ... of exclusions" (George 18). Home creates unity by defining who and what does not belong. And this is precisely what constitutes Lotman's semiosphere: the separation of the meaningful semiotics of culture from the nonsemiotic external other ("On the Semiosphere" 205). For the same reason, the delimitation of home is closely related to the formation of identity. "The conflation of home and self," George observes,

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with reference to the feelings of belonging"; "[a] person's own country or native land"; the "place where something originates, flourishes, or is most typically found."

pervades the interdisciplinary discourse of home (19). Humanistic geography, for instance, sees home as a foundation of self, Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling write in *Home* (2006). Home is “an essential place,” Blunt and Dowling add, “through which [people] make sense of their world” (11). Identity is linked to and created by the “lived and imaginative experiences of home,” Blunt and Dowling specify (24). Apart from this primary idea of belonging, the use of the term *home* in this study is based on a number of characteristic yet not essential aspects, which provide a guideline rather than a set of rules for the reading of the fictional home spheres. It must also be noted that home is determined by context and within this study always refers to a Western or Euro-American perspective (D. Morley 25).

Many studies in the field acknowledge the existence of widespread intuitive, commonplace notions of home. But whether home is approached from an everyday perspective or from a more analytic angle, notions of home usually comprise aspects of both ideal and lived homes, George explains (2). Blunt and Dowling confirm that a “central feature of imaginaries of home is their idealization” (100). In reference to Sigmund Freud’s *Das Unheimliche* (1919), translated to *the uncanny* or *the unhomely*, Blunt and Dowling call this ideal the “homely” home (26), an untainted but, in reality, also unattainable sphere of belonging. The family home ideal, for example, locates home “in other places and times,” “in an unchanging past,” “in nature” and often suggests “heritage,” “power and success” (Blunt and Dowling 246). Such imaginary constructions stand in contrast to experiences of alienation—the “unhomely” home (D. Morley 19-20; Blunt and Dowling 107-108). Referring to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Homi Bhabha directly links this unhomely home to a war context: “the cultural confusion wrought by terrible wars and mutual conflicts” leads to the “‘unhomely’ condition of the modern world” (145). While his “‘unhomely’ is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience,” Bhabha acknowledges resonances in other kinds of fictions (142). Thus, the present project also takes into account this differentiation of home into ideal and experience and asks whether there is an underlying unspoiled home ideal in the examined texts: How do these narratives imagine home as desired?

A widespread understanding of home in this context is that of a shelter, safe haven, and place of security (e.g., Mallett 70; D. Morley 24), even though in academia this has been challenged as a defining feature of home in general (Mallett 71; Chapman 133). Feminist scholars like Laura Goldsack, for instance, argue: “For women in the home, privacy can mean confinement, captivity and isolation” (121). Examining work on homelessness by Syd Jeffers, David Morley suggests that home is about the control of sheltered space rather than shelter itself (28). Tony Chapman’s observations concerning the identification of the individual with the house as home endorse this view: “[People] hope to create a sphere where they have control over their environment—to mould it to their own needs of comfort and security, style and personal morality” (134). The cracks in the family home

of Pat Barker's short story "Subsidence" (2003), originating down below in the ground where the protagonist is unable to reach, elude her control over her own home (chapter 1.). But nowhere is the fear of a loss of control more obvious than in Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday* (2005), in which the protagonist struggles to keep or regain control over his apparently heavily secured house—and life (chapter 4.1.1.). Nevertheless, the belief that the ideal home is a place of comfort and security is still to be found in popular thinking and thus relevant here.

Related to the semantic field of security and shelter is the association of home with privacy and the private (Mallett 71). Privacy, David Morley writes, is understood as "a key feature of home life, enabling family members to live as they please without the scrutiny of others" (29). But noting Walter Benjamin's observations on bourgeois notions of privacy, David Morley qualifies that such an understanding of home "clearly varies with its context" (29) and claims that ideas of privacy flourish "in a hostile social environment" (29). If this is the case, then war—the very state of hostility—furthers a withdrawal into the secure space of the home, rendering home a conceptual complement of war.

In the idea of home, notions of security and the construction of identity intersect. In his article "Spoiled Home Identities," Chapman argues that identity is bound up with the safe space of the house as home (135). The physical space of the house is turned into an identificatory space of home by shutting out the public, by establishing a spatial and temporal order, and by arranging objects of personal significance to individualise the interior (Chapman 135). The purpose of Chapman's article is to consider burglary as a prime example for disruptive "live events" that defamiliarise the home and make us aware of—by making strange—what is basic to our idea of self (145-146). The invasion of home by an uninvited and unidentifiable intruder is experienced as deeply unsettling, demonstrating "how the fabric of a house, its internal space and its contents come to embody the self-identity of the people who live there" (Chapman 145). Home emerges as a fragile construct that, when disrupted, immediately calls for the "re-evaluation of the meaning of things and space and ... the transformation of the image of home" (Chapman 133, 137). In the present study, war is—albeit on a broader scale—read as another one of these disruptive events which subvert feelings of security as well as the idea of a coherent self and thus initiate processes of reevaluation. While burglary rather affects an individual, a family or, in some cases, a smaller local community, war also impacts national, social, and cultural self-understandings. Special attention will be paid in the analyses of this study to images of intrusion and border crossing, such as burglaries and other transgressions as well as, conversely, lockouts and exclusions.

The all-encompassing scope of war requires an understanding of "home as multi-scalar" (Blunt and Dowling 22). Initial associations may refer to a parental home or family dwelling and yet "home is much more than house or household,"

Blunt and Dowling claim (3). One's rootedness in a family home can be translated to the superordinate level of culture which serves as an anchor point for trans-individual identity: "home ... can be conceptualized as processes of establishing connections with others and creating a sense of order and belonging as *part of* rather than *separate from* society" (Blunt and Dowling 14). As the example of "Subsidence" revealed, links are forged between micro- and macro-levels of home (chapter 1.). Not only the private, individual self is linked to home, but home is located where public and private spaces overlap (Blunt and Dowling 17; also, George 16). As Blunt and Dowling write, "senses of belonging and alienation are constructed across diverse scales ranging from the body and the household to the city, nation and globe" (27; also, Findlay 116). Home can be effective on individual and familial, communal and local, social and cultural, national and international levels. Scholars, such as Sallie A. Marston, investigate such scalar gradations of the social landscape. Arguing from a social theory perspective within the field of human geography, Marston claims that these levels are interrelated and exposes their demarcations as constructed: She speaks, for example, of "scale-making" and its material effect on social structures (221) and discusses "the social construction of space-place tensions" (238). Blunt and Dowling confirm this interdependency at various points in their study *Home* and highlight the metonymic projection of the micro-home onto the national home: "the characteristics of the nation ... can be influenced by processes occurring at the scales of home and household" (29). In other words: "The family home appears as an integral location for imagining the nation as home" (Blunt and Dowling 140). These connections render relevant the individualised war narratives examined here and support their significance beyond the private. In these narratives, spaces of affiliation are set on different levels such as family home, military community, or national belonging. These homes are, in turn, interconnected in specific ways in the narratives even though they span from individual life-worlds to large-scale homeland. And in the analyses, attention will be paid to how the scales of home interact.

Home is also a material, geographic place. At least in a general sense, it is located: "Conventionally, in the West a home is, of course, inscribed in the particular physical structure of a house" (D. Morley 19). While this suggests the relevance of architecture to the discussion of home (Mallett 66), other levels of the home-scale implicate the disciplines of urban planning (D. Morley 21-22) and national geography (Blunt and Dowling 2). For the present project, home's geographical locatedness calls for the examination of spatial structures created in the fictional representations examined. To work out the texts' individual representation of home, fictional actual space(s), places, and spatial relations will be investigated for their individual, social and cultural significance. What forms these home spaces and how do they work to present a specific image of British culture in the texts? Where is the

narrative located? Is, for instance, the setting urban, suburban, or rural? Which milieus and neighbourhoods are evoked in the narratives?

Yet, home is always more than a spatial location: It is “a meaningful place,” Blunt and Dowling write, a place defined by “how people relate to and experience their dwelling as well as how people create a sense of home in terms of ... belonging” (11). Blunt and Dowling introduce home as a “*spatial imaginary*,” as “a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places” (2). Home is at once “material and imaginative,” a spatial structure *and* a constellation of emotional and cultural associations and ideas; and its meaning unfolds in the connection of these aspects, “as a *relation* between material and imaginative realms and processes,” Blunt and Dowling state (22). Their notion of home thus links to Soja’s notion of *thirdspace*, which unifies and exceeds the binary logic of real versus mental space, as Winkler, Seifert, and Detering explain (263). The Wootton Bassett example (chapter 1.) shows how real locations gain cultural significance: The airbase, in principle just an infrastructural facility of the military, came to be a “point of entry” for war into the homeland and the town through which the cortèges passed a “surrogate border” (K. Davies 249). Hovering between materiality and meaning-making, home corresponds with Lotman’s spatial semiotics (chapter 3.1.), which also relates real-life spaces and spatial relations to the meaningful organisation of culture.

Furthermore, considering that Wolfgang Iser similarly describes the fictional as “always hovering between the real and the imaginary” (20), George’s observation that “fictionality is an intrinsic attribute of home” (11) brings to attention the proximity of the literary mode and the construction of home. George writes: “The search for the location in which the self is ‘at home’ is one of the primary projects of twentieth century fiction in English” (3). In *Twenty-First-Century British Fiction* (2015), Rhona Gordon confirms the relevance of home for literature: It goes beyond the nuclear family’s dwelling and home-making practices to interlink political decision-making and the characters’ “sense of place in the world” (126). In fiction, George adds, “home’ is a desire that is fulfilled or denied in varying measure to the subjects (both the fictional characters and the readers) constructed by the narrative” (2).

Though often physically located, home is neither immovable nor static. Blunt and Dowling, for instance, corroborate the “spatial and historical variability of both metaphorical and lived homes” (21). This flexibility is the precondition for the reworking of home into a home/front in the examined narratives. Essentially dynamic, home is subject to negotiation, constantly deconstructed and rebuilt. On a related note, George explains that home is not only dependent on historical situation but also on location and perspective:

Home-country and home resonate differently from different locations for different subjects and often even for the same subject at different locations. And yet while the actual cultural practices change rapidly and dramatically, the desired ideals that such practices are modelled after are much slower to change. (17-18)

While George acknowledges the dynamics, she also observes the inherent inertia in the home ideal. Complementary to its continuous mutability, the idea of home possesses a resistance to change. Home thus persists in the tension of its continuities and discontinuities. Constituted by repeatedly performed “home-making practices,” home is persistently confirmed and renegotiated at once (Blunt and Dowling 23). Home has to be ‘kept alive,’ affirmed and maintained, while repetition with variation may reconfigure the concept over the long term. This also places the analytical focus of the present study on the configuration of characters as agents of both home and war. Which protagonists function as representatives of British home culture? And what is their relation to war? Home is also characterised by the character’s position and the hierarchisation of space within the narrative: A character may be located at the cultural core or periphery, move in between, or be placed at the cultural centre in one respect and assume a peripheral role in another.

Equally, home is defined by its negations: Homelessness, migration, and other forms of uprootedness and mobility defy the ideas of permanence, belonging, and origin implicit in the term.<sup>4</sup> This renders particularly significant the character of the returning soldier as traveller across the border between home and war. This figure will be important for the analyses of the narratives of recent warfare in the coming chapters. It will be crucial to see how returning soldiers modify the spaces they enter and how they are changed in the process themselves. In addition to this, attention will be paid to the motifs of travelling, moving to a new house, homecoming, military deployment, patrols, repatriations of those killed at war, and so on that often challenge ideals of home.

In recent years, discussions of home in postcolonial, transnational, and global contexts in works such as Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan’s *Postcolonial Geographies* (2002) give prominence to “persons living outside of homeland” (Boticello 2). Migrant home spaces rarely feature in the texts examined in the present project, but other transitory “home[s] away from home” (Blunt and Dowling 158) are relevant: Military camps abroad, the soldier’s barracks, makeshift night quarters on patrol as well as getaway holiday spots appear as transient substitutes for home in the war context. Aside from that, characters are relocated more permanently, moving

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4 See Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling’s chapter on “Transnational Homes”; Rosemary M. George’s chapter “‘Travelling Light’: Home and the Immigrant Genre”; Liz Kenyon’s “A Home from Home: Students’ Transitional Experience of Home”; and David Morley’s *Home Territories*, which deals with homelessness (26-30), rootlessness (33-34), mobility as well as migrancy (chapters 2 and 7).

within the homeland, as in the novel *Wish You Were Here* (chapter 4.2.) or the television series *Homefront* (2012) (chapter 6.1.3.), to the effect that home affiliations have to be reconceptualised. The contrastive pair of origin or rootedness versus mobility, both in spatial and notional terms, is relevant to the representation and reconceptualisation of home and self.

### 2.3. Home/Front

The term *home front*, which in general denotes the civilian sphere of belonging of a given country at war,<sup>5</sup> implicates a number of paradoxical tensions for the reason that the home ideal as described above stands in opposition to key aspects of what it means to be at war: Home is community, war is opposition; home is a secure space, war is guided by violence; the home is private, war is a state affair; and so on. Because of these semantic as well as historical connotations of the term *home front*, the *home/front* of the present project must be differentiated from other uses of the term.

In British culture, the idea of a home front refers above all to the World Wars and in particular to “the Home Front myth of the Second World War” (Korte, “Wars” 14). The myth purports an “unprecedented social and moral solidarity” of the British in the face of “total war,” epitomised in the experiences of the Blitz and Dunkirk (Harris 17-18). Considering the famous civilian flotilla disembarking once again to save ‘our’ troops in the 2017 blockbuster *Dunkirk*, the myth still keeps today (Rodríguez). In reality, Jose Harris notes, neither the distribution of wealth, the industry, nor class or gender roles were revolutionised in the ways the Home Front myth suggests; resistance, discontent, and despondency were very well present in Britain at the time (19). Though television series have, in recent years, touched upon aspects that challenge the image of “the ‘People’s War,’” cultural production in general has kept alive the association of the home front with World War II, “Britain’s ‘good war,’” as Maggie Andrews writes in her contribution to *The Home Front in Britain* (2014) (235-236). The articles in this volume, edited by Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, give an outline of established themes of the discourse on the British home front in the World Wars, such as domesticity and work as well as femininities and masculinities.

The idea of home/front in this study does not directly relate to such established notions of the term *home front*. Not only do the realities of historical and present life in Britain differ as to how war interferes with home society; in the present project, the home/front is also located on an abstract, figurative level to present

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5 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *home front* as the “civilian life and population of a country ... engaged in military conflict elsewhere, ... another front in a consolidated war effort.”

the narrative process of conflating war and home in the examined fictions. And yet, references to previous home front contexts are not entirely without relevance. Still present in cultural memory through popular media or practices of remembering, World War home fronts are explicitly referenced in at least some of the texts this study investigates.

In the contemporary context, one understanding of home front is that of domestic, or homegrown terrorism, a problem the UK addresses through CONTEST, the Home Office's counterterrorist strategy since 2003 (House of Commons 4; also, Chin 22, chapter 7). As a separate issue of the War on Terror, however, domestic terrorism is not a major issue in narratives dealing with the military campaigns. Effectively, Britain is hardly ever presented as a multicultural society in narratives of the recent military campaigns, whereas *London River* (2009), a film about the 2005 London bombings, emphasises Britain's cultural diversity. Still, homegrown terrorism may be present as a generalised threat fostering cultural anxieties as, for instance, in the novel *Wish You Were Here* where the protagonist at one point ponders possible terrorist links to the caravan site he owns (61) (chapter 4.2.). In "The 'New Home Front' and the War on Terror," Gillian Youngs explores in more detail the "multiple dimensions" of the home front in a War on Terror context—only one of these dimensions is domestic terrorism—and their political and ethical implications (925).

Another home front is the virtual front created by communications technologies; this is a terrain much harder to control than in older wars, Youngs claims, giving the example of the circulation of the Abu Ghraib pictures (927). Further, Youngs notes how the War on Terror dilutes distinctions between war and home front: Not only do communications technologies dramatically decrease, if not override, the distance of battlefield and homeland regarding the flow of information; the separation of the foreign and the domestic is also obliterated by the simultaneous action against external and internal threats (928, 930). As a last point, Youngs argues that multiculturalism, often bound up with "racialized gender politics," is a new home front in the War on Terror because it has created an awareness for the cultural diversity of Britain that so far had been "largely taken for granted" (934, 936).

Some of these old and new home fronts may be relevant for texts in the corpus of this study on the level of themes and content. The *home/front* concept at the basis of this study, however, denotes the process of negotiating home in times of contemporary war in narrative fictions of different media. The term *home/front* is chosen to illustrate how the British cultural home sphere is challenged and affected by the contemporary wars (or fronts) abroad. The term is particularly suited for the purpose of this study because it captures the simultaneously unifying and alienating effects of war on the home. In this study, the *home/front* term is used to reveal how the fictional material opens up a space to express and think through

the tensions between home and war spheres. Moreover, the “inextricable links between wars fought at a distance and the multiple connections with home societies” that are expressed in the term *home front* relate to both macro and micro levels of home, as Youngs writes (926), which are constitutive of the present project’s notion of home as well.

The central claim is that fictions of contemporary war in Britain may best be understood if they are read as narrative negotiations of home that transform the sphere of belonging into a home/front. The home/front, as it is used in this study, does not only denote an endpoint or final arrangement that the narratives arrive at. Instead, the term also describes the process of renegotiating home in the face of war on the level of the individual texts, a dynamic narrative self-diagnosis of Britain at war. Taken together, the narratives contribute to the wider cultural process of exploring the signification (and significance) of the complex experiences that constitute these all too recent wars. The term *home/front*—applied to the narratives—thus covers a diversity of negotiations of Britain at war and marks the point where the different narratives intersect despite all text- and media-specific differences.