

**GRIEVABLE AND UN-GRIEVABLE LIVES: PHIL KLAY'S  
REDEPLOYMENT**

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**Abstract**

The Middle East occupies considerable space in the US media and public debate after America's recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. This paper examines Phil Klay's delineation of these wars in his award-winning story collection, *Redeployment* (2014), in accordance with its approach to the value of life of both Americans and non-Americans and its perspective(s) on violence. It is Judith Butler's contention that, in Western democracies, lives and deaths are treated with a different method; while the lives of western citizens are valued and grieved, the lives of non-citizens are devalued and ungrieved. I investigate the status of life/death in this work in the first section while the stories' appropriation(s) to and justification of violence are elaborated in the second part. In these stories, fatalities among both Americans and locals are abundant and grief appears to dominate the scenes, however, in rather different way.

**Keywords:** grievable, Phil Klay, *Redeployment*, ungrievable, war fiction

**KEDERLİ VE KEDERLİ OLMAYAN YAŞAMLAR: PHIL KLAY'IN  
REORGANİZASYONU**

**Öz**

Ortadoğu, son 20 yılda, özellikle Amerika'nın Afganistan ve Irak'taki son savaşlarından sonra, ABD medyasında ve kamuoyunda önemli bir yer almaktadır. Bu makale, Phil Klay'ın bu savaşların tanımını, ödüllü öykü koleksiyonu olan *Redeployment* (2014)'da hem Amerikalıların hem de Amerikalı olmayanların yaşam değeri ve şiddet perspektifinden incelenmektedir. Judith Butler'a göre, Batılı demokrasilerde hayat ve ölümler farklı olarak değerlendiriliyor, Batılı vatandaşların hayatları daha değerli ve kederli olmalı düşünürken, vatandaş olmayanların hayatları daha az değerlidir. Birinci bölümde yaşam / ölüm durumu incelenirken, öykülerin uygunluğunu ve şiddetin gerekçesi ikinci bölümde ele alınmaktadır. Bu öykülerde, Amerikalılar ve yerliler arasındaki ölümler sahneler oldukça çoktur ve kederli görünmektedir.

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*Anahtar Sözcükler:* kederli, Phil Klay, Reorganizasyon, dayanılmaz, savaş kurgusu

### Introduction

After less than one-month of the 9/11 attacks, the United States led a war on Afghanistan and started another on Iraq in 2003 under the umbrella of 'War on Terror'. Thousands of American service personnel were deployed in these distant geographies, many of whom molded their experiences into literature. Phil Klay is one of those veterans who served in Iraq between 2007-2008 and wrote his first story collection, *Redeployment*, in 2014. Throughout the twelve stories, American recent wars are brought under deliberation by diverse characters, settings and circumstances. Klay's collection was largely acclaimed and received the 2014 National Book Award among many other rewards. It was labeled as the best literary work written by veterans in recent years (Packer, 2014), "a must-read for anyone with the slightest interest in the actuality of the wars that have been fought in our names" (Docx, 2014, para. 9), and "the best thing written so far on what the war did to people's souls" (Filkins, 2014, para. 4).

Klay's work receives wide attention from a variety of voices from diverse backgrounds. Tyrell Mayfield (2016) argues that Klay's veterans return home either dead or traumatized and that does not reflect truism of war where many soldiers return home unharmed. Soldiers are acted upon; they have no control over their circumstances and are passively the victims of war. Klay's characters are mainly preoccupied with their own survival rather than grandeur of valour (Alosman, 2020, p. 1025). What is of utmost concern for Roy Scranton (2015), however, is soldiers' responsibility for war crimes; He considers Klay's work a continuation of what he terms as 'trauma hero', a tradition in war literature that begins with Wilfred Owen, Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemingway, Tim O'Brien to Kevin Powers. He considers such an approach to soldiers' involvement in war as problematic in the sense that soldiers are victimized rather than held accountable for war atrocities. Scranton (2015) argues that at the expense of questions regarding motives of war and its local victims, the anguishes of soldiers are magnified in what Scranton calls 'a politics of forgetting.'

*Redeployment* is also regarded as an anti-war fiction, by some reviewers, owing to its elucidation of the reprehensibility of war where it asks America to listen to the despicable stories of its soldiers in order to re-evaluate their entanglement in recent wars in the Middle East (Kunsa, 2017, p. 236). It also induces diverse, and sometimes contradictory, views regarding its approach to these wars and to militants' accountability/victimhood. In line with

Kunsa's view, Paul Petrovic (2018) believes that the collection rightly critiques war, in general, and American soldiers' uninvestigated misconducts, in particular. It raises readers' awareness of what occurs in combat without dictating specific attributes about soldiers' actions and behaviors (Booth, 2019, p. 188). Klay does not try to convince his readership to pity American veterans or to ignore the sufferings of people they have murdered (Booth, 2019, p. 188). What seems to be certain, though, is that Klay's work engages a diversity of commentators and critics from different backgrounds and interests.

Twelve stories delve into the complications of America's recent wars with twelve narrators who are militants, civilians, and chaplains, among others. This article examines how these stories approach the value of life/death of both American and non-American characters within the context of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I investigate the status of life/death in this work in the first section while the stories' appropriation(s) to and justification of violence are elaborated in the second part.

### **Conceptual Framework: When Is Life Grievable?**

On September 11, 2001, the world was shocked by the many images and videos from the catastrophe which kept circulating constantly in all news agencies for months. The death of more than three thousand Americans and the destruction of one of America's landmarks saddened not only Americans but millions of people throughout the world. The stories of those traumatized, injured, and killed occupied media outlets and kept flowing incessantly. In less than one month, the US started a war on Afghanistan and another one on Iraq in less than two years under the slogan 'War on Terror'. Hundreds of thousands of local people lost their lives and more injured. Most cities in these two geographies were turned into large-scale sites of destruction and millions of people were displaced. The deaths and sufferings of millions of local people were barely reported and briefly mentioned in Western media, especially when compared to the expansive and extensive coverage of the September attacks. Casualties in these Middle Eastern countries were mainly presented as lifeless numbers of unidentifiable figures.

In her seminal book, *Frames of War: When is life grievable?*, Judith Butler (2009) poses a question about the value of lives; "whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable[?]" (Butler, 2009, p. 38). She contends that the world is divided into two sections, grievable and ungrievable lives; while a grievable life is mourned and revered, an ungrievable life is not mourned as its life never counts as life. Wars are waged so as to preserve the lives of some people who are defended

against the lives of others, even if that means annihilating the latter lives. On 9/11, the images and stories of American families are circulated repetitively while there is significantly less public grieving for non-Americans while illegal workers are totally ignored, even though all of them died under the same circumstances. Such differential distribution of public grieving is a political issue that has been practiced for thousands of years where

governments seek to regulate and control who will be publicly grievable and who will not [because] [o]pen grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential, [. . .] [it]would disrupt the order and hierarchy of political authority as well (Butler, 2009, p. 39).

In the US most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the effect is regulated to support the war effort and to prevent all that might disturb the official narrative. Therefore, once the photos from Abu Ghraib are broadcasted, conservative commentators claim that it is “unAmerican to show them” (Butler, 2009, p. 40). Americans are not supposed to know about their government’s acts of torture, violation of recognized human rights, and how these wars are erroneously conducted. Such knowledge is limited in order to decrease public awareness of the awful realities of war which would turn public opinion against the war in Iraq.

Talal Asad (2007) also has questions about the reasons behind the felt horror and moral repulsion concerning suicide bombing while the same cannot be said about state-sponsored violence. He wonders why both acts of violence should not produce the same feelings of outrage and repugnance in the West, even though modern states destroy and disrupt life more easily and on a much grander scale. What is heeded in the west is the means by which people are killed and killers’ motivations, not the actual acts of murder or dehumanization. Modern states justify state propagated violence out of the belief that they are different and morally advanced while others are not. People in the West react differently to the loss of lives under certain conditions; They consider the death of those who are killed in a war sponsored by a state as regrettable and sad while if such death is perpetrated by insurgency groups it is considered illegitimate, then the reaction invariably changes.

Though every war or act of violence has some fatalities, not all casualties are regarded and treated equally, some have more privilege than others. Butler (2009) maintains that people in the US differentiate between those on whom their life and existence depend and those who represent a direct threat to their life and existence;

When a population appears as a direct threat to my life, they do not appear as "lives," but as the threat to life (a living figure that figures the threat to life) . . . Those we kill are not quite

human, and not quite alive, which means that we do not feel the same horror and outrage over the loss of their lives as we do over the loss of those lives that bear national or religious similarity to our own" (Butler, 2009, p. 42).

Asad (2009) contends that there are different approaches to deal with death; the west objects to suicide-caused deaths more compellingly and with greater moral outrage than to aerial-bombings executed by armies. Some people are considered socially dead or as living threats to the lives of westerners (Butler, 2009, p. 41). In current wars, there are defensible, valuable, and grievable lives and "those that are not quite lives, not quite valuable, recognizable or, indeed, mournable" (Butler, 2009, p. 42-43).

Although state armies are supposed to abide by humanitarian law, they do not seem to do so as demonstrated by many war crimes committed by these armies (Asad, 2007, p. 60). They can wage wars without being held responsible for their actions so long as the army belongs to a strong state. Regardless of the just or unjust status of such wars, "they have always constituted an integral part of the right to defend oneself and one's way of life" (Asad, 2007, p. 60). In a modern state, there is a guarantee of life for "the citizen-soldier who is prepared to kill and die for it, yet whose health, longevity, and general physical well-being are objects of the democratic state's solicitude" (Asad, 2007, p. 61-61). It has the absolute right to use force and violence in order to defend itself against the different and backward enemy who poses a threat to the civilized world.

Suffering is also represented differently depending on the nationality of the victims in a way that affects people's responsiveness, and particularly, how certain figures determine what will and will not be grievable (Butler, 2009, p. 75). There are explicit or implicit norms that govern which lives are considered human and which are not; "These norms are determined to some degree by the question of when and where a life is grievable and, correlatively, when and where the loss of a life remains ungrievable and unrepresentable" (Butler, 2009, p. 74). In the case of Guantanamo Bay, American police harassment of Muslims after 9/11 and the suspension of civil liberties, certain rules have been operational in determining who is human and thus entitled to human rights and who is not. This debate implies the question of grievability: whose life would be publicly grievable if terminated and whose life would be ungrievable?

While some people are considered human, others are not, because they do not exemplify the norm that regulates what and who will count as human life (Butler, 2009, p. 76). The norm creates "the nearly impossible paradox of a human who is no human, or of the

human who effaces the human as it is otherwise known" (Butler, 2009, p. 76). When local people are devastated in recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they are regarded as not yet having arrived at the idea of the rational human (Butler, 2009, p. 125). They are murdered and their countries are destroyed because they are thought to constitute a threat to the human, "the West," which is positioned to "articulate the paradigmatic principles of the human-of the humans who are worth valuing, whose lives are worth safeguarding, whose lives are precarious, and, when lost, are worth public grieving" (Butler, 2009, p. 125). Gregory (2004) asserts that on more than one occasion, American officials emphasize the notion of Americans' supreme value when addressing the high numbers of local casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their lives are considered more valuable than those of locals who are chiefly treated as threats to Americans' lives.

Muslim peoples are regarded as being outside the civilizational trajectory that decides the human, provides the guardians of civilization the "right" to use violence against them, and rationalize the war against Islam in the belief that Islam poses a threat to Western culture as well as prevailing norms of humanization (Butler, 2009, p. 130). Since Muslims are believed to pose a threat to western peoples and cultures, the justification for their torture and death is secured as they are not considered human. And American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are to be conceived within their civilizational framework regarding the backward and "pre-modern Islamic Other" (Butler, 2009, p. 132). Since western countries regard themselves as the guardians of democracy and their communities as representing these democratic ideals, they believe that they qualify to undertake justified violence against those who do not represent such ideals (Butler, 2009, p. 132). Some acts of violence are rationalized and upheld while other means of violence are defiled and criminalized.

This article problematizes Klay's delineation of the value of life and grieve(ability) of both Americans and locals as well as his approach to state perpetrated violence as illustrated in *Redeployment*. This article investigates Klay's stories in two sections; The first section, 'Grievable/Ungrievable Lives,' elaborates on the stories' positions regarding the value of the life of Americans and locals and compare them, while the second part, 'Justified/Unjustified Violence,' expounds on how violence is recognized, treated and justified/condemned in each story.

## Analysis

### Grievable/Ungrievable Lives

Wars are known to be the sights where life is unwarranted and death is abundant, especially for locals who find themselves in the midst of forced circumstances. Scenes of scattered corpses of Iraqis in the streets of Iraq are recurrent in war fiction like Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013), Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* (2013), and Klay's *Redeployment* (2015). In "Redeployment," the first story in Klay's collection, Sergeant Price recounts how he used to shoot dogs to prevent them from devouring the corpses of Iraqis despite the fact that he is a "dog person" (Klay, 2015, p. 1). He steps up and shoots a dog that is "lapping up blood the same way he'd lap up water from a bowl," even though it is not "American blood" (Klay, 2015, p. 1). He is upset about the scene and finds himself obliged to interfere and stop the profane act. Though the act of averting the dog from transgressing the sanctity of the dead is empathetic, one may ask who is behind the death of the man in the first place, who is accountable for these scenes of death, and why only the bodies of Iraqi people are left unattended to rot in the streets and alleys? Scranton (2015) answers that by focusing on a peripheral detail, like that about shooting dogs, Klay conceals the significant fact about American soldiers' responsibility for such deaths. We are brought to appreciate the soldier's act and forget his accountability as part of an occupying force.

Local people have no particular features to be remembered with in "Redeployment"; they are mainly faceless figures or corpses rotting and dissolving under the sun. While preparing to mercy-kill his aging dog, Sergeant Price remembers the other time he hesitates to pull the trigger when he and other Marines find an insurgent hiding in a cesspool beneath liquid shit "like a fish rising up to grab a fly" (Klay, 2015, p. 15); They aim at him except Price. Scranton (2015) argues that this story is primarily written for American readers who will care more about the death of the dog than that of the Iraqi. It is worth notice that the insurgent has no facial expressions or character that might make him memorable. He is rather an abstraction of a man who is less valuable than Price's dog, Vicar, whose appearance, adorable actions, warmth of body are fully described. He dies in a contemptible way in the midst of a cesspool while the dog dies in a more honorable way after being "happy all his life" (Klay, 2015, p. 14). Scranton (2015) rightly argues that there are almost no Iraqi characters in *Redeployment* except some caricatures. With no distinguishing human traits, the Iraqi man does not appear to induce grief or empathy from the readership like that we have for Vicar, the old dog.

The lives of Iraqis do not have much value in their homeland since they can be murdered, even slaughtered, by American soldiers who do not give consideration to any legal consequences or punishment. In this episode, an Iraqi insurgent who is seriously injured in the chest and who is expected to die in a second, “but the company XO walks up, pulls out his KA-BAR, and slits his throat. Says, “It’s good to kill a man with a knife.” All the Marines look at each other like, “What the fuck?” (Klay, 2015, p. 3-4). Even though all the other Marines are disgusted by the act, no action seems to be taken and the terrible deed goes with impunity which indicates the insignificance of Iraqis’ lives.

One way to justify civilian casualties at war is to conflate non-combatants with militants; They become more susceptible to injury and death. In the third story, “After Action Report,” American soldiers are not able to differentiate the militant from the civilian in Fallujah (Klay, 2015, p. 30). They are unable to identify the source of threat or the potential attacker. After the soldiers are targeted with an explosion and while they are trying to recover from the shock, Iraqis stare at them; “One of them was the bomber, probably, waiting to see if there was gonna be a CASEVAC [evacuation of casualties by air]. They get paid extra for that” (Klay, 2015, p. 30). Civilian are thus complicit in targeting American soldiers; “The civilians were probably watching for it, too. You can’t plant a bomb that big without the neighborhood knowing” (Klay, 2015, p. 30). All Iraqis become accordingly suspects and justified targets for an American reprisal; Their lives are made dependent on how Americans interpret their actions and presence and act accordingly. Americans are thus cleared from any responsibility for the numerous civilian casualties in Iraq, whereas Iraqis are held accountable for being ambiguous, i.e., not distinguishable as civilian or militant so much so that the big question pertaining Americans’ presence in Iraq is obliterated.

Civilian lives are also conflated with those of militants in “Prayer in The Furnace” where a lance corporal who has witnessed the murder of his colleague tells the chaplain, “The only thing I want to do is kill Iraqis [ . . . ] That’s it. Everything else is just, numb it until you can do something. Killing hajjis is the only thing that feels like doing something. Not just wasting time” (Klay, 2015, p. 148). When asked whether he means insurgent Iraqis, he retorts, “[t]hey’re all insurgents” (Klay, 2015, p. 148). He shows the chaplain a photo of a five- or six-year-old boy “planting an IED [improvised explosive device]” (Klay, 2015, p. 148). American soldiers wait until the kid leaves to blow the IED; they make sure that the kid does not get hurt. When the lives of non-combatants and combatants are confused with each other, they become more susceptible and endangered in the context of war. Civilians are thus



turned into suspects and legitimate targets whose lives hold no immunity which, in turn, explains the huge numbers of civilian fatalities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There are other episodes where civilian lives are targeted accidentally by American soldiers who find it difficult to make decisions about the source of fire or whether Iraqis are militants or not. After American soldiers are attacked, they call for artillery support and it blows the suspected building (Klay, 2015, p. 33). Then, they “walk through and find pieces of little kids, tiny arms and legs and heads everywhere” (Klay, 2015, p. 33). A Sergeant asks the soldiers, “What you gonna tell a nine-year-old girl who don’t know her daddy’s dead ‘cause his legs is still twitching, but you know ‘cause his brains is leaking out his head?” (Klay, 2015, p. 33). Elsewhere, the Marines kill “a family that failed to brake in time” (Klay, 2015, p. 140). Americans who take part and witness these events appear to be saddened and sometimes traumatized by the scenes; “when you get back to the States no civilians will be able to understand what you’ve gone through” (Klay, 2015, p. 157). Americans’ acts are shown to be in retaliation for an Iraqi assault, rather than the opposite, which indicates their victimhood. They are also keen on the lives of Iraqis as they do their best to avoid casualties among them. We are to empathize with what Scranton (2015) calls ‘trauma heroes’, soldiers who undergo trauma while being deployed where their ordeal is magnified to induce compassion. Americans allow the psychological anguish suffered by soldiers who are primarily sent to kill for the safety of their country displaces and erases their accountability for Iraqis’ fatalities. They become innocent witnesses and victims of the despicability of war.

When cities are turned into battlefields, children become less safe and more vulnerable to lethal combats. In both *Redeployment* and *The Yellow Birds*, there are some armed Iraqi children who get killed while holding their arms. While American soldiers are under the shock after their convoy is attacked, they fire with their guns at a suspected, and yet unseen target (Klay, 2015, p. 31). Then, they hear a woman’s scream; “a woman in black, no veil, and maybe a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old kid lying on the ground and bleeding out” (Klay, 2015, p. 31). They are dumbfounded when they find out that they have killed the boy whose gun is lying beside him. They figure that he has “grabbed his dad’s AK when he saw us standing there and thought he’d be a hero and take a potshot at the Americans [. . .] But apparently he didn’t know how to aim” (Klay, 2015, p. 32). As his mother tries to pull him back into the house, she sees “bits of him blow out of his shoulders,” and Timhead, the soldier in charge of the kill, takes “a big step back from reality” (Klay, 2015, p. 32). The heart-breaking scene induces much compassion and empathy, however, for a relatively small

narrative space with the rest of the story concentrating on Timhead's felt guilt. Timhead becomes the center of the narrative and readers have more empathy for his extended anguish. What is more memorable than the boy's death is the soldier's humane standing and his long struggle with this excruciating experience.

Accountability for the kid's murder is further discussed when Timhead's colleague Lance Corporal Paul, nicknamed Ozzie, tells the chaplain, "I don't even think that kid was crazy, [. . .] Not by hajji standards. They're probably calling him a martyr [. . .there is something] fucked with this country [Iraq]" (Klay, 2015, p. 44). The issue becomes an Iraqi one; it is not related to the war waged by the United States but rather to Iraqis' perception of martyrdom. Blame is thus shifted from the US Military to the people and land of Iraq. Hence, Iraqis' culture of martyrdom takes responsibility for the kid's murder. Private Bartle, in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*, shares Ozzie's feelings of misgivings about Iraq and its bad omen for Americans. Iraq becomes more visible as the sight of evil and the source of Americans' extended sufferings.

Despite the several heart-breaking scenes of civilian fatalities in "Prayer in The Furnace," the death of Fujita, the American soldier, is far more grievable and memorable. When his squad approaches the battle cross at his memorial service, "they knelt close together, their arms over one another's shoulders, leaning into one another until it was one silent, weeping block. Geared up, Marines are terrifying warriors. In grief, they look like children" (Klay, 2015, p. 132). While the death of the American soldier is treated with respect and reverence, Iraqis' corpses are left to die, rot and dissolve in the streets; They are less grievable than Americans.

Iraq is made a hostile and aggressive land where death lurks for Americans in every corner; "People trying to kill you, everybody angry, everybody crazy all around you, smacking the shit out of people" (Klay, 2015, p. 151). The city of Ramadi becomes "an evil thing" where they commit "evil things all around" (Klay, 2015, p. 152). Some soldiers are "gone [. . .] Acosta ain't Acosta no more. He's wild [. . .] How can you say this place ain't evil?" (Klay, 2015, p. 152). Iraq and Iraqis are to hold responsibility not only for their own miseries but for the sufferings and misconducts of Americans; Americans are thus the victims of the people and geography of Iraq. What is evident in Klay's stories is the victimhood of the US soldiers and the viciousness of Iraq, people and geography, and that entails proportionate degrees of value ascribed to American and Iraqi lives where the former holds a supreme value and the later a diminished one.

### Justified/Unjustified Violence

Asad (2007) argues that acts of violence are treated inconsistently in the West; while modern states' violence is justified by means of morality, others' violence is condemned and regarded as an act of terrorism despite the fact that the first inflicts far more damage to the civilian life than the second. A contrastive image is drawn between the acts of American soldiers and al-Qaeda members in the second story, "Frago." Even though not all militants in Iraq belong to al-Qaeda in *Redeployment*, however, there is an emphasis on their presence and horrible deeds in Iraq. American liberators intervene to set free two Iraqi men who have been imprisoned by al-Qaeda. They untie them and provide first aid for them because they are strapped with wire to chairs which is "dug into their skin, so getting them loose is tricky without stripping off more flesh. Also, something's wrong with their feet" (Klay, 2015, p. 19). And while inspecting al-Qaeda hideout, Dyer, an American Private, shoots one of al-Qaeda members in the face as he shows up without warning. Dyer uses his first aid kit to rescue the bleeding man, though he is not supposed to do so with his own kit. He is too worried about the man's health and keeps asking about his state while being treated by the US medics. As he learns that the man has died, he is saddened to the point that he loses appetite for food. Americans' rescue of the Iraqi prisoners and treatment of al-Qaeda members is contrasted with al-Qaeda's cruel and brutal acts to accentuate Americans' rather civilized and moral model.

"Prayer in The Furnace" illustrates some aggressive tendencies and behaviors in the US Army where soldiers, under the influence of their officers, believe in violence as the only and most successful method to deal with locals (Klay, 2015, p. 141). They are the minority in the army while the majority are annoyed and disgusted by such an extreme approach to civilians and combatants. Captain Boden, a company commander, believes that Iraqis are "a people who do not understand kindness [ . . . ] They see kindness as a weakness. And they will take advantage of it. And Marines will die" (Klay, 2015, p. 141). Captain Boden finds a complaint regarding his soldiers' aggressive behavior as "funny" (Klay, 2015, p. 141). What is funnier for him is the Civil Affairs trainer's concern regarding the battalion's excessively focus on "killing people" (Klay, 2015, p. 141). Boden ridicules the trainer, "I guess that pogue thinks he joined the fucking Peace Corps [ . . . ] some real men might go out and kill some al-Qaeda. But I just wanna be friends" (Klay, 2015, p. 141). Soldiers, under Captain Boden's commandment, take the "advice to heart, roughing up several role players during training" (Klay, 2015, p. 141). They would use obscene words when they deal with insurgents or

civilians. Even though they are critiqued and condemned in the story, they are still shown to be exceptional while most soldiers are depicted as compassionate and considerate. As the story condemns Captain Boden's behavior and acts, it implicitly advocates the idea of the peacefulness and benign presence of the US Army in Iraq. As the story exposes some atrocities committed by a minority in the US Army, it advocates and justifies what the majority do in Iraq.

Though wars kill many civilians and disturb many lives, still, wars are regarded as legitimate because they are thought to defend western peoples' lives within the outline of "civilization" and "barbarism" (Asad, 2007, p. 91). When civilians are killed, their death is attributed to their presence in the wrong time and place and for being unaware of the hazardous surroundings (Klay, 2015, p. 145). Major Eklund tells the chaplain that in war,

Sometimes, by accident, there's civilian casualties. It's not our fault [. . .] you have no idea what these guys [soldiers] are dealing with. On my last deployment I saw a couple insurgents literally hiding *behind a group of Iraqi children* and shooting at us. Do you know how hard it is to get shot at and not respond? And that's what my Marines did. They let themselves get shot at because they didn't want to risk hurting children. [. . .] *Most Marines are good kids*. Really good kids. But it's like they say, this is *a morally bruising battlefield*. My first deployment, some of those same Marines fired on a vehicle coming too fast at a TCP. They killed a family, but they followed EOF perfectly. The driver was drunk or crazy or whatever and kept coming, even after the warning shots. *They fired on the car to save the lives of their fellow Marines*. Which is *noble*, even if you then find out you didn't kill al-Qaeda—you killed a nine-year-old girl and her parents instead [Emphasis Added] (Klay, 2015, p. 145).

It is relevant to note that while the story provides some incidents where non-combatants are killed unintentionally by US service members through Major Eklund, the huge number of civilians killed and maimed in war is obliterated. Blame is shifted to militant Iraqis who take advantage of the civilian presence to provide camouflage for their attacks on Americans or by Iraqis' negligence and unawareness as shown in the drunk driver's case. Most of the Marines are presented as caring and eager to avoid jeopardizing civilian lives. Their warfare in Iraq is excluded from the whole argument as if it is a neutral and natural one. What is also problematic for Americans is the "morally bruising battlefield" (Klay, 2015, p. 145), not their very presence inside cities full of civilians. Therefore, when Americans use fire, they only do that for the purpose of safeguarding their lives, even if that means endangering Iraqis' lives; Their lives are not valuable when compared to Americans' lives.

For Asad (2007), the lives of Americans are of paramount importance even if that means extinguishing the lives of thousands of non-citizens.

The chaplain in “Prayer in The Furnace” raises the issue of Americans’ culpability for some of the violence inflicted on them and he relates that to the actions and behaviors of some American soldiers (Klay, 2015, p. 157). He tells them in a Sunday Mass that he has heard American soldiers say that Iraqis, including civilians, “should be razed. Should be burned, with everyone in it [Ramadi] perishing in the flames” (Klay, 2015, p. 157). He recounts a story about an Iraqi father whose daughter suffers from injuries in a cooking accident. He brings his daughter to the Marine squad to get help, she receives health care and medication, and her life is saved. When the father is asked whether he feels grateful to Americans, he answers, “No” (Klay, 2015, p. 158). This Iraqi has,

“already lost a son [. . .] to the violence that came after the invasion. He blamed us for that. He blames us for the fact that he can’t walk down the street without fear of being killed for no reason. He blames us for his relatives in Baghdad who were tortured to death. And he particularly blames us for the time he was watching TV with his wife and a group of Americans kicked down his door, dragged his wife out by the hair, beat him in his own living room. They stuck rifles in his face. They kicked him in the side. They screamed at him in a language he did not understand. And they beat him when he could not answer their questions (Klay, 2015, p. 158).

The chaplain is concerned about how the behavior of some American soldiers is affecting Iraqis’ views on Americans and that, consequently, motivates more aggression against Americans. However, the Iraqi’s whole argument regarding Americans’ misbehaviors is refuted when the translator describes him as a “bad guy. An ‘ali baba” (Klay, 2015, p. 158). The man’s argument is also challenged by his resorting to Americans’ assistance which implies their renowned benevolence and that contradicts the man’s claims regarding their misconduct with Iraqis. The whole episode highlights the untruthfulness of some narratives that accuse Americans of misconduct and emphasizes their rather benevolent conduct.

### **Conclusion**

In 1996, when Madeleine Albright, who was then the US permanent representative to the United Nations and later became the US Secretary of State, was asked about over 500,000 Iraqi children who had died as a result of the American sanctions on Iraq in 1991, she replied, “We think it’s worth it” (quoted in Gregory, 2004, p. 175). In the same vein, the lives of American service personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan appear to have the highest value in comparison with those of local people in the Middle East. In spite of Klay stories’ attempt to

depict the sufferings undergone by local people, such misfortunes are illustrated mainly under a subcategory of Americans' lived trauma in Iraq and Afghanistan. Local people are by and large faceless and flat characters whose miseries are invested to show Americans' humane standing. The lives of locals are drawn to complete the image of the American victimized soldiers whose sufferings are intended to induce empathy and to eliminate their full responsibility for the large scale of death and destruction inflicted on local peoples and lands. American soldiers are thus depicted as traumatized victims of war, not the persecutors of its atrocities. While stories like Klay's illustrate the despicability of war and make war more reviled, it provides unconditional pardon for its basic makers, soldiers, who are made victims, not aggressors.

While the world still commemorates the victims of the 9/11 attacks every year and recollects their names, photos, and stories, hundreds of thousands of lives which are lost in America's recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are consigned to oblivion. They are only numbers in deserted records with no faces or names to be remembered with. This approach to human lives should be challenged, curbed, and eradicated. Every life on the planet should matter regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or origin.

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