

Camaraderie and Identity in the Crucible of War: Analysing Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*

Savaşın Ateşinde Kardeşlik ve Kimlik: Gregory Burke'in *Black Watch* Eserinin Analizi

Sedat BAY 

(Corresponding Author- Sorumlu Yazar)

Department of English Language and Literature, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Letters, Sivas, Türkiye
Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Sivas, Türkiye
sbay@cumhuriyet.edu.tr



Abstract

This research examines how the intense experiences of war shape the bonds between soldiers and their sense of self, as portrayed in Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*. By thoroughly analysing the play, this study explores how shared experiences, adversity, and the allure of collective belonging shape soldiers' identities. This study investigates how military identity develops, focusing on the impact of historical, traditional, and shared cultural elements. Moreover, it investigates the dynamic conflict concerning individual and collective identities, highlighting the pressures to conform while preserving individuality. Drawing on social identity theory, the essay explores how broader social constructs intersect with military experiences, shaping soldiers' perceptions and behaviours. Ultimately, this study aims to enhance the comprehension of the psychological and social intricacies experienced by service members, illuminating the lasting effects of war on both individuals and society.

Keywords: Camaraderie, identity, *Black Watch*, Gregory Burke, war

Öz

Bu makale, Gregory Burke'in *Black Watch* oyununda işlendiği üzere, savaşın zorlu koşullarında yoldaşlık ile kimlik arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Oyunu titizlikle analiz eden bu çalışma, paylaşılan deneyimlerin, zorlukların ve ortak bir amaç etrafında birleşmenin askerlerin kimlik gelişimine nasıl etki ettiğini araştırmaktadır. Askeri kimliğin oluşumunu derinlemesine inceleyen araştırma, gelenek, tarih ve ortak geçmiş gibi faktörlerin bu süreçteki rolünü ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, bireysellik ile toplumsal uyum arasındaki dinamik gerilimi ele alarak, askerlerin hem bireysel kimliklerini korumak hem de gruba uyum sağlamak zorunda kalmalarını vurgulamaktadır. Sosyal kimlik teorisinden yararlanılarak, bu makale daha geniş toplumsal yapılar ile askeri deneyimler arasındaki etkileşimi inceleyerek askerlerin düşünce ve davranışlarını şekillendiren faktörleri ortaya koymaktadır. Nihayetinde, bu araştırma askerlere özgü psikolojik ve sosyal karmaşıklıkları daha iyi anlamaya katkıda bulunarak, savaşın bireyler ve toplum üzerindeki uzun süreli etkilerini aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yoldaşlık, kimlik, *Black Watch*, Gregory Burke, savaş

Received/Geliş Tarihi 26.07.2024
Revision/Revizyon Tarihi 11.11.2024
Accepted/Kabul Tarihi 17.01.2025
Publication Date/Yayın Tarihi 25.06.2025

Cite this article:

Bay, S. (2025). Camaraderie and Identity in the Crucible of War: Analysing Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*. *Journal of Literature and Humanities*, 74, 73-83.

Atıf:

Bay, S. (2025). Savaşın Ateşinde Kardeşlik ve Kimlik: Gregory Burke'in *Black Watch* Eserinin Analizi. *Edebiyat ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi*, 74, 73-83.



Content of this journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License.

Introduction

Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* (2007) offers a stark and unflinching exploration of military life, looking deep into the psychological and emotional complexities experienced by soldiers. The play offers a profound perspective on how individual identities are shaped and influenced by group affiliations. By thoroughly revealing the dynamics of brotherhood or camaraderie within the high-pressure military environment, Burke reveals how shared hardships, and a common goal forge the identities of soldiers. This essay will analyse the complex interplay between military identity and camaraderie, exploring how these constructs are forged, evaluated, and ultimately transformed through the crucible of war.

Burke highlights the seductive power of military institutions, arguing that they "refine their appeal to the male psyche's yearning for a strong identity" (Burke, 2007, p. vii). *Black Watch* epitomizes this phenomenon, cultivating a distinct identity through a potent blend of history, tradition, and shared experiences. The regiment's legendary history, built on triumphs and setbacks, offers new members a pre-established sense of mission and belonging. This allure, coupled with the promise of a unique identity, draws young men into the ranks.

Black Watch is a series of recollections shared by disillusioned Scottish soldiers with an investigative journalist seeking firsthand accounts of their Iraq experience. The journalist's limited understanding mirrors the public's ignorance about the war's realities. The depth of the soldiers' suffering is conveyed when one, struggling with depression, threatens to harm the journalist to emphasize the impossibility of truly understanding their ordeal without experiencing it firsthand (Ledger, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Clare Finburgh, 2013, p. 49). Burke challenges audience expectations of a typical war drama by opening the play in an unexpected setting, immediately distancing the audience from familiar wartime tropes. The soldiers belong to the Black Watch, a renowned Scottish regiment with a 300-year history. This unit has a global reputation for bravery and continues to draw new recruits eager to uphold its legacy. One soldier insists to a documentary crew that they voluntarily chose this path, emphasizing that they had other career options (Finburgh, 2013, p. 49).

While the Black Watch embodies a sense of collective unity, Burke also acknowledges the diversity within the regiment. Although rooted in the Scottish heartland, the unit comprises soldiers from various backgrounds. This interplay of shared and divergent experiences enriches the fabric of brotherhood, creating a complex tapestry of identities. The intense loyalty and camaraderie forged within this microcosm, as Burke describes it, a "tribe" (p. 8), are central to understanding the military experience.

The play brilliantly examines the complex interplay between personal identity and group belonging. Brotherhood, forged in the crucible of shared adversity, provides a powerful source of support. However, this tight-knit bond can also exert pressure to conform, potentially stifling individual expression. As the characters grapple with the challenges of war, they confront the complexities of balancing personal identity with the demands of collective duty.

The play provides a profound exploration of the human psyche under the crucible of war. By analysing the intricate interplay between military identity and camaraderie, this essay aims to unveil the enduring impact of conflict on both individuals and society. To dig into these complexities, we will employ theoretical frameworks that illuminate how identity is shaped and transformed within hierarchical environments. Examining the convergence of social, military, and personal identities will offer a more comprehensive grasp of the experiences depicted in *Black Watch*.

Social Identity

Social identity is a complex concept that influences how people see themselves and relate to others. It's shaped by group affiliations and the associated beliefs and feelings and is a fundamental part of personal identity (Raz, 2021; Schmidt, 2019). As Tajfel (1981, p. 255) articulated, social identity is derived from an individual's awareness of group affiliation and the significance attached to it. The sense of belonging profoundly influences behaviour and perception. It answers the fundamental question: Who am I? Shaped by affiliations with diverse social groups defined by physical, social, or psychological attributes, social identity permeates various aspects of life. While often overlooked in military contexts, it significantly impacts soldiers' worldviews, actions, and expectations. Understanding the characters' social backgrounds and hierarchical positions—a concept known as positionality—is crucial for comprehending *Black Watch*.

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals derive a significant part of their self-image from group membership, which consequently affects their interactions with others (Neighbors, et al., 2013, p. 325). Individuals incorporate group affiliation into their self-perception, affecting interactions within and between groups. While extensively applied to intergroup relations, the theory's implications for domains like military service are less explored. Research suggests a correlation between group identification and military behaviours, highlighting the potent influence of social context on decision-making (Neighbors et al., 2013, p. 325). Ellemers (2024) emphasizes the theory's focus on predicting when individuals prioritize individual or group identity.

Building on Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament's (1971) foundation, individuals who self-categorize into specific groups and

situate themselves within relevant social contexts develop a shared collective identity. This shared identity subsequently influences individual behaviours and interactions (Morela et al., 2016, p. 212).

The Impact of War on Identity and Brotherhood

War is a crucible that forges and fractures both individual and collective identities. In *Black Watch*, Gregory Burke vividly illustrates this transformative process as soldiers grapple with the profound impact of combat on themselves and their brotherhood. The shared trauma of war simultaneously strengthens and strains the bonds between these men, as they navigate the complex interplay of loyalty, fear, and survival.

Beyond the physical and psychological toll, war also erodes moral compasses. *Black Watch* unflinchingly explores the ethical dilemmas faced by soldiers, challenging notions of heroism and sacrifice. The play suggests the profound human toll of conflict as characters wrestle with the repercussions of their choices. The psychological and spiritual devastation caused by witnessing or committing horrific acts, known as ‘moral injury,’ is crucial to understanding the long-term consequences of war on individuals and their relationship.

By examining the complex interplay between individual identity and collective brotherhood, *Black Watch* offers a powerful and unflinching portrayal of the human cost of war. Through Burke's play, we witness how the harsh realities of combat forge and refashion soldiers, creating lasting impacts on their individual journeys and their relationships.

Military identity is deeply intertwined with broader social constructs. While the barracks forge a particular kind of camaraderie and collective identity, soldiers also carry with them the social identities shaped by factors such as class, ethnicity, and nationality. To fully understand the complexities of these characters, it is essential to examine how these intersecting identities influence their experiences within the military.

Military Identity and Socialization

The military is deeply intertwined with politics, not just during wartime. Military leaders significantly impact policymaking by shaping procedures, providing information, developing “policy options, and implementing national security decisions” (Schmidt, 2019, p. 181). Politics is deeply ingrained in every aspect of military life. From the most minor details like military uniforms to major decisions about resource allocation, political considerations are always present. This means that the military is not simply a fighting force, but also a political actor with its own interests and goals (Spears, 2024, p. 3).

Over many years, individuals and the military as a whole develop shared values, principles, and beliefs through a process of mutual influence (Atkinson, 2014). This is a process where individuals learn to fit into a group through social interactions, cultural teaching, and formal training. They adopt the group's identity, beliefs, and behaviours (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Pitkin, 1972; Johnson, 2001; Atkinson, 2014).

Research shows that military officers tend to become more conservative over their careers. Those who initially hold moderate or liberal views are more likely to shift towards conservative viewpoints over time. Officers leaning towards moderate or liberal ideologies are more likely to leave military service than those with conservative viewpoints. Those who stay in the military and advance to higher ranks tend to hold political views that are less moderate or liberal compared to when they first joined (Holsti, 1998; Feaver & Kohn, 2001; Urban, 2010; Golby, 2011).

Shared social identity is a part of how people see themselves based on their membership in a particular group. This includes the importance and emotional connection they feel toward that group. People who identify with a group want to be recognized as members and value the group's knowledge and authority. They often act in ways that match the group's standards and look to the group for guidance (Brewer, 1991; Terry & Hogg, 1996; Tropp & Wright, 2001).

Shared beliefs, a common understanding of what's true, and a united focus on policy goals work together to create a strong group identity. This shared experience fosters close relationships and a sense of belonging. It shapes how individuals see themselves and how they believe they can impact policy decisions (Marsh & Rhodes, 1992). The ways in which members of a group are trained, promoted, and interact with each other, along with their shared experiences, influence how united and trusting the group is (Cross, 2013).

Military service can significantly transform an individual's sense of self. Upon re-entering civilian life, numerous veterans encounter “identity dissonance,” a state of conflict between their military and civilian identities (Hodges, 2023, p. 24). This discord can lead to a sense of alienation from both the military and civilian spheres. While some veterans manage to amalgamate these divergent aspects into a unified “veteran” identity, others struggle with an enduring inconsistency between their military experiences and civilian life expectations. This phenomenon closely parallels the difficulties faced by international migrants who frequently contend with competing cultural demands (Hodges, 2023, p. 3; Schmidt, 2019; Young et al., 2022).

As Hodges (2023) suggests, having developed a military identity in the service, veterans may feel caught between the

military and civilian worlds – as if the person they became in the military is both unfulfilled but also holding them back from being a civilian (p. 5).

Military identity centrality, interdependence, and viewing the military as a family may be maladaptive to civilian life. However, veterans who had more pride in the military had a better quality of life and social connectedness compared to those with lower pride (Flack & Kite, 2021).

Military Camaraderie and Identity in the Crucible of War: Analysing Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*

Black Watch provides a stark and unflinching portrayal of the psychological and emotional toll of war on soldiers. The play underscores the ways in which combat experiences challenge and reshape individual and collective identities. The initial enthusiasm and idealism with which many young men enlist are quickly tempered by the harsh realities of military life. As Cammy laments, "It wasnay like I thought it was gonday be," (p.7) the disillusionment experienced by many soldiers is palpable. The play suggests that the army is often seen as a refuge for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, a perception reinforced by the character's observation, "They poor fucking boys. They cannay day anything else. They cannay get a job. They get exploited by the army" (p. 3). This highlights the complex relationship between social class, economic opportunity, and military service.

The process of military socialization involves a complex interplay of coercion and consent. The assertion, "Well, we'll need to get fucking used tay it. Bullying's the fucking job. That's what you have a fucking army for," (p. 4) encapsulates the culture of hazing and hierarchy that often prevails within military units. This environment contributes to the formation of a collective identity based on shared suffering and resilience, but it can also lead to the suppression of individual voices and critical thinking.

The deployment to Iraq exposes the soldiers to the ultimate test of their physical and psychological endurance. The news report detailing the casualties suffered by the Black Watch vividly illustrates the devastating impact of war on human life. The phrase, "The area in which they were to be deployed was described here as the 'triangle of death'," (p. 8) foreshadows the horrors that await the soldiers. The loss of life and the physical injuries sustained by the survivors underscore the devastating effect of war on individuals and communities.

... Well, we'll need to get fucking used tay it. Bullying's the fucking job. That's what you have a fucking army for (p. 3).

Cammy *It wasnay like I thought it was gonday be. I don't know what the fuck I thought it was gonday be like, but it wasnay like what it was (p. 7).*

Rosco *I thought it was gonday tell me something about the meaning ay life ay. (p. 7)*

These citations provide a critical perspective on the military, challenging the often-romanticized view of service. The characters' voices reveal the human cost of military life, emphasizing the emotional and psychological toll on young recruits. The normalization of bullying and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals are presented as systemic issues within the military culture. This portrayal of the military is in stark contrast to the idealized image often presented in popular culture. It offers a more realistic and critical view of the experiences of young soldiers, highlighting the challenges they face and the impact of military life on their lives. These statements illuminate the complex relationship between individual identity, brotherhood, and the realities of war. They highlight the challenges faced by soldiers as they navigate the pressures of military life, the trauma of combat, and the subsequent process of reintegration into civilian society.

The dialogue between Geoff Hoon and Alex Salmond (pp. 8-9) underscores the political manoeuvring involved in the deployment of the Black Watch to Iraq. Hoon expressed his dismay at Salmond's comments, accusing the leader of the Scottish Nationalists of exploiting the tragic deaths of three soldiers and their interpreter for political gain. Hoon was unable to comprehend why someone would seek to take advantage of such a situation. In contrast, Salmond acknowledged the professionalism and bravery of the soldiers, asserting that they would fulfil their duties despite the dangers. However, he maintained that the deployment and the decisions surrounding it were politically motivated, especially in the context of the American presidential election.

Hoon's defensive stance and Salmond's critical assessment reveal the contrasting perspectives on the war. The politicians' focus on public opinion and political expediency is juxtaposed with the human cost of the conflict, as evidenced by the tragic loss of life. The soldiers, caught in the middle of this political chess game, become pawns in a larger geopolitical struggle.

The play emphasizes the importance of history and tradition in shaping military identity. The references to the regiment's past, particularly the connection to the Battle of Bannockburn (p. 25), underscore the weight of history on the shoulders of the soldiers. The invocation of the "Golden Thread" (p. 25) highlights the sense of continuity and belonging that comes from being part of a long-standing military tradition. By focusing on the past, we're forced to confront the moral dilemmas faced

by those who came before us. It challenges us to question whether the sacrifices made in the past are still justifiable in the vastly different context of modern warfare.

The soldiers' experiences in *Black Watch* reveal the contradictions inherent in military life. The initial idealism and sense of purpose are gradually eroded by the harsh realities of war. The juxtaposition of the soldiers' desire for recognition and the cynical manipulation of their image by politicians highlights the complexities of their situation. The play challenges the notion of the soldier as a selfless hero, revealing the human cost of military service and the impact on the individuals and their families.

By examining the following conversations, we can see how Burke effectively uses dialogue to explore the interplay between individual experiences, collective identity, and the broader political context. The play invites us to question the motivations behind military service, the impact of war on individuals and societies, and the role of politicians in shaping public opinion.

Lord Elgin *This is Robert the Bruce's sword.*

Rosco *Well, get Robert the fucking Bruce tay go way you then.*

Cammy *Aye.*

Lord Elgin *Bannockburn.*

Beat.

Freedom.

Beat.

Robert the Bruce and that? (p. 26).

...

Cammy *We started before Culloden. We dinna really ken when. 1715, or maybe 1725. When Scotland was an independent nation we were fucking mercenaries tay half ay fuckin Europe. But it was 1739 when we really threw our lot in way the British. (p. 30)*

These conversations further illuminate the complex interplay between individual and collective identity within the context of the Black Watch regiment. They reveal the soldiers' grappling with their role in history, the pressures of contemporary warfare, and the contradictions inherent in military service.

The references to historical events or figures such as Robert the Bruce, Bannockburn, and Culloden underscore the importance of historical narratives in constructing and maintaining military identity. The invocation of Robert the Bruce serves to create a sense of continuity and purpose, linking the present-day soldiers to a heroic past. However, the soldiers' cynical responses to these historical references reveal a certain detachment from the idealized version of Scottish history presented by figures like Lord Elgin.

The soldiers' discussions about their role in the British Army illuminate the complexities of national identity and loyalty. The reference to Scotland as "a fuckin mercenary tay half ay fuckin Europe" (p. 30) reveals a cynical perspective on the nation's military history. Juxtaposing the regiment's proud heritage with its involvement in colonial conflicts and contemporary wars underscores the inherent contradictions of military service. Cammy's assertion, "Since 1745 the Black Watch has fought all over the world. A lot ay the time we've been used in tribal conflicts. We're good at them" (p. 31) reinforces this view.

The dialogue between the soldiers and Lord Elgin highlights the role of propaganda in shaping public opinion and justifying military action. The invocation of the "Hun" (p. 27) as a threat to civilization echoes the rhetoric used to mobilize support for previous wars. The soldiers' cynical responses to this rhetoric reveal a certain degree of scepticism about the official narrative. This scepticism is further amplified by their rejection of traditional military symbolism, as exemplified by Cammy's assertion that the Black Watch's tartan is not a symbol of betrayal but rather a rejection of the "Cullodenshite" (p. 30). This suggests a deep-seated disillusionment with the historical and contemporary justifications for war.

Through these excerpts, *Black Watch* offers a complex and nuanced portrayal of the military experience. The play challenges simplistic notions of patriotism and heroism, revealing the human cost of war and the contradictions inherent in military service and shows that individuals are shaped and exploited by larger societal forces, revealing the complex relationship between personal identity and collective pressures.

The stark reality of this critique is underscored by Cammy, a character from the play, who reflects on the controversy surrounding the deployment. He observes that while there is an initial excitement about being in a war, the soldiers are not truly performing the job they were trained for pointing out that the perceived threat to their country is minimal, as they are not defending their homeland but rather invading another country and disrupting the lives of its people (p. 38).

This dehumanizing perspective, as seen in Cammy's observations, is further evidenced by the play's portrayal of the

enemy. The reference to the “Muslim world” (p. 32) as a potential audience for pornography reveals a dehumanizing and stereotypical view of the enemy. This reflects the broader cultural and political climate of the time, where the “War on Terror” (p. Backcover) was often framed in simplistic terms of a clash of civilizations. The soldiers’ casual use of such stereotypes highlights how language can be used to construct and reinforce prejudices.

Cammy’s response to the reporter’s question offers a stark contrast to the official rhetoric about the war. His description of the situation as a “buzz” reveals a certain detachment and cynicism about the mission. The admission that they are not “really doing the job [they]’re trained for” (pp. 38, 49) suggests a sense of disillusionment with the military’s role in the conflict. The claim that they are “invading their country and fucking their day up” (pp. 38, 49) is a blunt and honest assessment of the impact of the war on the Iraqi people.

The soldiers in the play are torn between their patriotic duty and their disillusionment with the war. This internal conflict highlights the play’s central theme of the clash between individual beliefs and societal expectations. By examining these excerpts, we can see how *Black Watch* provides a critical perspective on the war in Iraq and the impact of military service on the soldiers involved.

The dialogues between the soldiers reveal the performative aspects of masculinity within the military context. The exaggerated use of profanity and the competition for dominance are common tropes of male bonding. However, the play also subverts these stereotypes by exposing the vulnerability and uncertainty beneath the tough exterior. The characters’ attempts to cope with the trauma of war through humour and bravado highlight the complexities of their experiences.

The reference to the Reconnaissance Platoon as “poofs” (p. 45) is a homophobic slur that reflects the homophobia prevalent in many military cultures. This serves to reinforce traditional notions of masculinity and to exclude those who do not conform to these norms. However, the play also suggests that these stereotypes can be challenged and subverted.

The soldiers’ conversations about their experiences in Iraq reveal the absurdity and futility of the conflict. The contrast between the idealized image of the soldier as a heroic warrior and the mundane reality of military life is stark. The soldiers’ attempts to find meaning and purpose in their experiences are often met with frustration and disillusionment.

The play also highlights the dehumanizing effects of war. The casual references to violence and death reveal a certain desensitization to human suffering. The soldiers’ efforts to cope with the trauma through humour and dark humour suggest a coping mechanism for dealing with the overwhelming horror of their experiences.

Cammy *Ya cunt, what fucking country did you fucking invade?*

Rosco *What?*

Granty *Was it fucking Wales?*

Rosco *‘Red Flowers. Red Flowers.’*

Macca *Pakifuckinstan, ya cunt.*

Rosco *Hey, any cunt that’s got a fucking problem way the accent, we should step the fuck outside for ten seconds and resolve the fucking issue ay? (p. 47)*

The soldiers’ awareness of the media’s portrayal of the war is evident in their conversations. The reference to the “Red Flowers” stereotype reveals a cynical view of the media’s role in shaping public opinion. The soldiers’ frustration with the public’s lack of understanding of their experiences highlights the gap between the reality of war and the public perception.

The juxtaposition of the soldiers’ order for Chinese food (p. 55) with their experiences in Iraq highlights the absurdity of their situation. The mundane act of ordering takeout serves as a stark contrast to the horrors of war. This contrast emphasizes the soldiers’ attempts to find normalcy and escape from the realities of their environment.

The Officer’s warning about the changing nature of the threat underscores the challenges faced by the military. He states, “We now face an enemy different to any we’ve faced in the regiment’s history” (p. 57). The emergence of suicide bombers as a tactic highlights the evolving nature of warfare and the increased risks faced by soldiers. The comparison to the IRA suggests a historical continuity of violence and terrorism, emphasizing the global nature of these challenges (p. 57).

The soldiers’ craving for familiar foods and routine activities can also be interpreted as a way to manage the stress and trauma they experience from war. The contrast between the banal act of ordering food and the life-threatening experiences they have endured highlights the psychological impact of combat. By examining these excerpts, we can see how the play uses seemingly mundane details to reveal the profound impact of war on the soldiers’ lives. The juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary creates a powerful sense of irony and absurdity. It is noted that Western societies have failed to comprehend the logic of suicide terrorism, which is often the result of a struggle to establish an identity during adolescence. Accepting the possibility of death allows individuals to reframe themselves as religious warriors in search of glory, a stark contrast to the soldiers who, despite their bravery, are unlikely to find glory in their controversial war. The lack of expected victory parades underscores the futility and misunderstanding surrounding their mission. Furthermore, higher-ups in the

chain of command place immense and unrealistic demands on the troops, expecting rapid adaptation to new and challenging situations. Facing an experienced, well-trained, and highly dedicated adversary, it is no surprise that these forces are quick to engage, potentially turning the conflict into a prolonged battle of wills (p. 58).

The Officer's analysis of suicide terrorism as a search for identity is a complex and controversial issue. Whether individuals seek out extremism as a source of life's meaning and purpose remains a controversial topic. While the play offers one possible explanation for the phenomenon, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of such generalizations. The Officer's recognition of the challenges faced by the troops highlights the psychological toll of war. The expectation to adapt quickly to a rapidly changing and dangerous environment creates immense pressure on soldiers. The reference to the enemy as "extremely experienced, well-trained and often very, very dedicated people" (p. 58) underscores the formidable nature of the threat they face.

The Officer's acknowledgment of the potential for a "battle of wills" (p. 58) suggests a recognition of the protracted nature of the conflict. The implication is that the war may become a war of attrition, with both sides inflicting casualties on each other. This raises ethical questions about the justification for continued military engagement.

Such a protracted conflict also has a profound impact on the soldiers' morale and perspective. As evidenced by the dialogues in the play, the soldiers feel exploited and objectified by the media and the public. Stewarty's accusation that the Writer is seeking to portray them as "a fucking shower ay cunts" (p. 60) reveals a deep-seated cynicism and distrust towards those outside the military. This exchange highlights the disconnect between the public's perception of war and the soldiers' lived experiences.

The play reveals a profound sense of brotherhood among the soldiers. Their frequent use of the term "cunt" (pp. 5,9,10,14,16...) as a form of endearment underscores their camaraderie and sense of belonging. However, this camaraderie rests on a foundation of trust and loyalty, which is threatened by the perceived intrusion of the writer. The soldiers' fear of being negatively portrayed highlights the importance they place on maintaining a collective identity. Their shared military experiences have forged a strong bond, and they are fiercely protective of their shared narrative. The dialogue suggests that any deviation from this narrative is seen as a betrayal of their collective identity.

Furthermore, the soldiers' suspicion of the writer reflects a broader distrust of outsiders. The military often operates in a closed environment, fostering a strong sense of in-group/out-group dynamics. The writer, as an outsider, is viewed with scepticism, and their motives are questioned. As Cammy asserts, "We're just trying to get through this fuckin' nightmare" (p. 59), revealing the desire to protect their shared reality from external scrutiny:

Writer No, I mean what is it like when it actually happens? At the time?

Granty Well, it's weird ay cos you've got a zap number.

Writer A zap number?

Cammy It's your first initials ay your second name, and your number. I was CA, **Charlie** Alpha, four, four, zero, two.

Granty So when something happens, it comes over the radio way the zap number ay the folk involved and then the code.

Cammy P-one, walking wounded. P-two wounded. P-three immediate surgery. P-four dead or dying.

Granty You hear the zap number and the codes and you're trying tay think who the fuck is that? (p. 63)

While the previous parts of the play emphasize the strength of brotherhood among soldiers, this part suggests a more complex reality. The impersonal nature of war can strain these bonds as soldiers grapple with the loss of comrades and the constant threat of their own mortality. This is exemplified by Cammy's revelation that Stewarty, suffering from depression after the first Iraq tour, was inexplicably deployed again due to lost paperwork. This systemic failure underscores the dehumanizing aspects of military bureaucracy and its disregard for soldiers' mental health, further fracturing the bonds of camaraderie (p. 65). The cold, clinical voice-over announcing, "Mother Uniform, three, three, six, two" (p. 68) starkly contrasts with the personal tragedy implied by Cammy's statement, highlighting the impersonal nature of warfare and its devastating consequences.

The soldiers' conversation about the potential suicide bomber (p. 63) reveals their heightened state of anxiety and hypervigilance, common symptoms of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Their discussion reflects the constant threat and uncertainty they faced in Iraq, which continues to impact their lives back home. Stewarty's violent outburst towards the writer is a manifestation of his pent-up aggression and frustration, likely exacerbated by his experiences in the war. His actions underscore the difficulty of reintegrating into civilian life after experiencing the horrors of war.

The disclosure about Stewarty's forced deployment highlights the systemic disregard for the mental health of soldiers. The military's failure to provide adequate support has severe consequences for individuals like Stewarty. The final voice-over, with its repetitive and cold recitation of casualties, creates a sense of overwhelming loss and despair. It underscores the immense human cost of war and the enduring impact on those who survive. The harsh realities of the situation stand in stark

contrast to the tender, private moments shared between characters.

The subsequent dialogue between the Officer and Cammy reveals the emotional toll of the conflict on both leadership and rank-and-file. While the Officer attempts to maintain a sense of duty and purpose, Cammy's decision to leave the regiment signifies a profound disillusionment with the war and its impact on his life.

Officer *And we owe them after today. You know, it would be okay if you didn't go.*

Cammy *I'm going, sir. This could be my last chance.*

Officer *It could be the regiment's last chance.*

Cammy *Maybe. But I know it's mine. I've fought my war.*

Beat.

I'm going home today bore every cunt in the pub today death.

Officer *So you're thinking about leaving us?*

Cammy *Absofuckinglutely sir. I'm offski.*

Officer *You did really well today. Getting those wounded lads out of there.*

Cammy *Did I?*

Officer *You're going to get stuck up for a medal for that today. You're the type of man this regiment needs, Campbell.*

Cammy *We're no gonny be this regiment any more. (p. 68)*

Cammy's decision to leave the regiment is a pivotal moment in the play, with far-reaching implications. While leaving the military might offer a respite from the physical and psychological trauma of war, it also presents new challenges. Cammy will likely face difficulties reintegrating into civilian life, grappling with issues such as employment, relationships, and mental health. His departure will undoubtedly strain his relationships with his fellow soldiers, as the bond forged through shared experiences is powerful and leaving the unit can be perceived as abandonment. Indeed, Cammy's decision to leave the military ultimately reflects a broader societal issue: the inadequate support and understanding often experienced by veterans upon returning home. The play is deeply concerned with the disillusionment experienced by soldiers returning from war, as the characters grapple with the disconnect between their experiences and the expectations of civilian life. Cammy's decision can be seen as a symptom of this broader disillusionment. The play also explores the search for meaning in the aftermath of war. Many soldiers struggle to find purpose and identity outside of the military structure. Cammy's departure represents a personal attempt to redefine himself and find a new path forward.

The dialogue between Cammy and the Officer offers a poignant microcosm of the complex emotions and challenges faced by soldiers returning from war. The interplay of duty, camaraderie, and personal survival is vividly portrayed. Cammy's initial willingness to return to the battlefield demonstrates a profound sense of loyalty and commitment to his unit. However, his ultimate decision to leave reveals the internal conflict between fulfilling these obligations and prioritizing his own mental and emotional well-being. The Officer's praise for Cammy's actions underscores the bravery and sacrifice exhibited by soldiers, but it does little to alleviate the psychological toll of war. Cammy's final declaration, "We're no gonny be this regiment anymore," (p. 68) signifies a profound disillusionment with the military and its objectives. It suggests a loss of hope for the future and a recognition that the regiment has been irrevocably changed by the war's experiences.

Cammy embodies the hardships countless soldiers endure upon returning from war. His departure from the military symbolizes the difficulties of re-adjusting to civilian life and the quest for new meaning beyond the battlefield. These challenges are starkly illustrated in the dialogue between Cammy and the Officer:

Cammy *This is pish. Sitting about daying camp security.*

Getting mortared all the time. Getting fucking ambushed.

Getting killed by suicide-bombers. And for what?

...

Officer *Yeah. Cursed. You see . . . my father, he was in Korea.*

Nineteen years old, Second Lieutenant. Got wounded. And promoted. And his father, he was at Loos. And his father, well he was more of a gambler than anything else, but you get my drift.

Cammy *I think so, sir.*

Officer *Some of us . . . It's in the blood. (p. 70)*

...

Officer *It takes three hundred years to build an army that's admired and respected around the world. But it only takes three years pissing about in the desert in the biggest western foreign policy disaster ever to fuck it up completely (p. 71).*

Cammy ...

The Officer leaves.

Scotland always had people willing tay serve in the army. (p. 71)

This conversation delivers a scathing critique of war and the military, starkly contrasting idealized notions of service with the grim realities of combat. Cammy's poignant query, "And for what?" encapsulates the soldiers' growing disillusionment as they endure immense hardship without a clear, justifiable purpose. The Officer's recounting of his family's military lineage underscores the cyclical nature of war, juxtaposing a tradition of service with the absurdity of the current conflict. His admission of the war as the "biggest western foreign policy disaster" (p. 71) further amplifies the sense of futility and wasted potential. Moreover, Cammy's final acknowledgment of Scotland's historical military contributions implicitly questions the enduring justification for such service, challenging the very foundation of the nation's involvement.

This exchange encapsulates a deep-seated disillusionment with the war, challenging the romanticized view of military service once again. The juxtaposition of the Officer's proud military heritage with his stark acknowledgment of the conflict as a "biggest western foreign policy disaster" (p. 71) creates a poignant sense of tragic irony. The play suggests that while Scotland boasts a history of military service, the current conflict represents a stark departure from the nation's values and ideals. The Officer's character embodies this internal conflict, evolving from a supportive leader to a disillusioned figure questioning the very foundations of his service. One key aspect of the Officer's character is his deep-rooted connection to the military. He comes from a long line of soldiers, highlighting the generational sacrifice and commitment to service. This sense of duty and tradition is evident in his pride for the regiment and his belief in its importance. However, this idealized view of the military is contrasted with his growing disillusionment with the current conflict.

The Officer's character ultimately reflects the broader themes of disillusionment and questioning the purpose of war explored in *Black Watch*. He represents the struggle between upholding tradition and recognizing the need for change, highlighting the complex relationship between individuals and the institutions they serve. This internal conflict is further amplified by the stark contrast between the Officer's rallying cry for unity and the soldiers' more personal motivations, as revealed in the following exchange:

Cammy *That's what we joined the army tay day.*

Rossco *Fight.*

Cammy *No for our government.*

Macca *No for Britain.*

Nabsy *No even for Scotland.*

Cammy *I fought for my regiment.*

Rossco *I fought for my company.*

Granty *I fought for my platoon.*

Nabsy *I fought for my section.*

Stewarty *I fought for my mates.*

Cammy *Fucking shite fight tay end way though.*

Officer *This may be the last attack for the First Battalion, the Black Watch. Let us make sure it goes as well as anything we have done in the past and is one that we can be proud of. (p. 72)*

The soldiers' responses to the question of why they joined the army reveal a spectrum of motivations, ranging from abstract patriotic ideals to personal bonds of camaraderie. However, this initial idealism is starkly contrasted by the disillusionment evident in Cammy's blunt assessment, "Fucking shite fight tay end way though," (p. 72) a sentiment that encapsulates the war's capacity to erode morale and shatter illusions. The Officer's subsequent demand for a "perfect" final attack, while intended to inspire, further underscores this disillusionment by ignoring the human cost and complexities of the situation, creating a chasm between the leadership's expectations and the soldiers' lived experiences.

The soldiers' initial idealism, evident in their varied motivations for joining the army, is starkly contrasted by the disillusionment wrought by the war's harsh realities. Their once-held aspirations have been eroded by the relentless demands of combat, leaving them questioning the purpose of their sacrifice. This disillusionment is further deepened by the chasm between the soldiers' experiences and the leadership's expectations, as epitomized by the Officer's demand for a flawless final attack, a demand that ignores the human cost and the complexities of the situation.

Camaraderie emerges as a potent force in *The Black Watch*, serving as a lifeline for the soldiers amidst the constant peril and trauma of war. As Cammy asserts, "I fought for my mates," (p. 72) encapsulating the profound bonds forged in the crucible of battle. Soldiers share a common understanding of hardship, offering mutual support and a sense of belonging. Their courage is evident in selfless acts, such as risking their lives to save comrades, while shared humour and solace provide temporary respite from the war's relentless brutality.

However, the war's relentless pressures can strain even the strongest bonds of camaraderie. As Stewarty's aggression towards the writer demonstrates, the psychological toll of combat can manifest in destructive behaviours. Moreover, the soldiers' collective questioning of their sacrifice, exemplified by Cammy's declaration, "Fucking shite fight to end with," can create fissures within the unit. Thus, while camaraderie is essential to survival, it is a delicate construct, susceptible to the corrosive effects of war.

Conclusion

Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* offers a searing indictment of war, exposing its devastating impact on individuals, societies, and the very fabric of human experience. By delving into the lives of Scottish soldiers deployed to Iraq, the play dismantles the idealized image of military service, revealing the harsh realities of combat and its enduring consequences.

The play masterfully explores the complex interplay between individual identity, collective belonging, and the pressures of war. The initial camaraderie and shared purpose among the soldiers gradually erode as they confront the horrors of combat and the moral ambiguities of their situation. The characters' journeys from idealistic recruits to disillusioned veterans highlight the human cost of war and the challenges of reintegration into civilian life.

Burke's use of stark realism and authentic dialogue creates a powerful and immersive experience for the audience. The play's unflinching portrayal of violence, trauma, and loss forces viewers to confront the devastating consequences of armed conflict. By centering the narrative on the experiences of ordinary soldiers, Burke humanizes the war and challenges the dehumanizing rhetoric often employed to justify such conflicts.

Black Watch offers a critical and unflinching portrayal of the military experience, challenging simplistic notions of patriotism and heroism. The play exposes the human toll of war and the contradictions within military service. By exploring the tension between personal and collective identity, it delivers a compelling critique of how individuals are moulded and manipulated by broader political and social forces.

While the play provides a compelling exploration of the psychological and emotional toll of war, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The focus on white, working-class Scottish men offers a partial perspective, and the long-term consequences of trauma, such as PTSD, could be explored further in the future. Nevertheless, *Black Watch* remains a significant contribution to the understanding of war's impact. By giving voice to the soldiers' experiences, Burke compels audiences to question the motivations behind armed conflict and to consider the enduring consequences for individuals and societies.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Financial Disclosure: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

References

- Archibald, D. (2008). *We're just big bullies ...'* Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*. Retrieved from University of Glasgow: http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3896/1/The_Drouth3896.pdf
- Atkinson, C. (2014). *Military Soft Power: Public Diplomacy through Military Educational Exchanges*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bergman, B., Burdett, H., & Greenberg, N. (2014). Service life and beyond: Institution or culture? *The RUSI Journal*, 159(5), 60-68. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2014.969946>
- Brewer, M. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17, 475-482.
- Burke, G. (2007). *Black Watch*. Kent: faber and faber.
- Finburgh, Clare. (2013). Press, Patrols and Power: The British Army in Recent UK Theatre. *Double jeu Théâtre / Cinéma*, 45-55. doi:10.4000/doublejeu.494
- Cooper, L., Caddick, N., Godier-McBard, L., Cooper, A., & Fossey, M. (2018). Transition from the military into civilian life: An exploration of cultural competence. *Armed Forces Soc.*, 44(1), 156-177.
- Cross, M. (2013). Rethinking epistemic communities twenty years later. *Review of International Studies*, (39), 137-160.
- Dawson, R., & Prewitt, K. (1969). *Political Socialization*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co.

- Ellemers, N. (2024, May 8). social identity theory. Encyclopedia Britannica. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-identity-theory>
- Feaver, P., & Kohn, R. (2001). *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Flack, M., & Kite, L. (2021). Transition from military to civilian: Identity, social connectedness, and veteran wellbeing. *PLOS ONE*, 16(12), e0261634. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0261634
- Golby, J. (2011, October 20-23). The Democrat-Military Gap: A Re-examination of Partisanship and the Profession. *Conference Paper Prepared for Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society Biennial Conference*. Chicago, IL.
- Heward, C. (2024, June). A Scoping Review of Military Culture, Military Identity, and Mental Health Outcomes in Military Personnel. *Military Medicine*, 1-12.
- Hodges, T. J. (2023, December). Moral Injury, Identity Dissonance, and Reintegration: A Compendium of Reintegration and Survey of United States Military Veterans. *Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation*. Kennesaw, Georgia: Kennesaw State University.
- Holsti, O. (1998). A Widening Gap between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society? Some Evidence, 1976-96. *International Security*, 23, 5-42.
- Johnson, A. (2001). Treating International Institutions as Social Environments." International. *International Studies Quarterly*, 45(4), 487-515.
- Ledger, M. A. (2011, April 26). *Seduction of the Innocent - Gregory Burke's "Black Watch" in Brooklyn*. Retrieved from Broad Street Review: <https://www.broadstreetreview.com/articles/gregory-burkes-black-watch-in-brooklyn>
- Marsh, D., & Rhodes, R. (Eds.). (1992). *Policy Networks in British Government*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morela, E., Hatzigeorgiadis, A., Sanchez, X., & Elbe, A.-M. (2016). Promoting Acculturation Through Sport: An Ethnic- Cultural Identity Approach. In M. Raab, P. Wylleman, R. Seiler, A.-M. Elbe, & A. Hatzigeorgiadis (Eds.), *Sport and Exercise Psychology Research From Theory to Practice* (pp. 211-228). Amsterdam • Boston • Heidelberg • London • New York • Oxford • Paris • San Diego: Academic Press.
- Neighbors, C., Foster, D. W., & Fossos, N. (2013). Peer Influences on Addiction. In P. M. Miller (Ed.), *PRINCIPLES OF ADDICTION Comprehensive Addictive Behaviors and Disorders* (Vol. 1, pp. 323-331). Elsevier Academic Press.
- Ohlert, J., & Zepp, C. (2016). Theory-Based Team Diagnostics and Interventions. In M. Raab, P. Wylleman, R. Seiler, A.-M. Elbe, & A. Hatzigeorgiadis (Eds.), *Sport and Exercise Psychology Research From Theory to Practice* (pp. 347-370). Amsterdam • Boston • Heidelberg • London • New York • Oxford • Paris • San Diego: Academic Press.
- Pitkin, H. (1972). *Wittgenstein and Justice*. Berkeley, CA: the University of California Press.
- Raz, S. (2021). *Introduction to Social Identities*. Retrieved from OPEN WA: <https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/dsj2021/chapter/social-identities-overview/>
- Schmidt, T. A. (2019). *Silent coup of the guardians: The influence of U.S. military elites on national security, doctoral dissertation*. Lawrence: University of Kansas.
- Smith, R., & True, G. (2014). Warring identities: Identity conflict and the mental distress of American veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Soc Ment Health*, 4(2), 147–161. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/2156869313512212>
- social identity. (2018, April 19). Retrieved from APA Dictionary of Psychology: <https://dictionary.apa.org/social-identity>
- Spears, C. M. (2024). Norms over policy: How the military's apolitical discourse theory drives institutional culture, foments denial of political realities, and undermines service member rights. *Ph.D. Dissertation*. Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Terry, D., & Hogg, M. (1996). Group norms and the attitude-behavior relationship: A role for group identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, (22), 776-793.
- Tropp, L., & Wright, S. (2001). In-group identification as the inclusion of in-group in the self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(5), 585-600.
- Urban, H. (2010). Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War: Party, Politics, and the Profession of Arms. *Doctoral Dissertation Georgetown University, Department of Government*. Found. Georgetown University.
- Young, S., Ondek, G., & Phillips, G. A. (2022). Stranger in a strange land: A qualitative exploration of veteranness. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 8(1), Article 1. doi:<https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v8i1.308>