

Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article

CONTRADICTING VOICES IN RYAN SMITHSON'S *GHOSTS OF WAR* (2009): IRAQ WAR, AMERICAN IDENTITY AND INTERPELLATION*

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ABSTRACT: Life writing provides a rich field of representation for Iraq War veterans. The genre provides them the necessary grounds to refute unwanted identities and claim the ones wished-for or believed-to-have. American politicians and military authorities have attributed Americans soldiers certain characteristics and roles before and during the war. Such interpellation leads to a symbolic interaction within the group as well as within oneself, making the authors feel pressured about fitting their behaviors in the symbolic definition of the American provided by the authorities. In Ryan Smithson's 2009 Iraq War memoir *Ghosts of War: The True Story of A 19-Year-Old GI*, being interpellated into a certain subject position forces Smithson into an ideological position. Many war narratives reflect this pressure whether or not they support the war. In Smithson's memoir, however, the narrating "I" and the narrated "I" contradict with one another about the way they view the war and the American soldier. The contradictions make the memoir a culturally significant work revealing the influence of prewar interpellation on the American soldier. Focusing on these contradicting depictions and making use of the sociological conception of interpellation, this article will analyze the role of interpellation in the identity formation of the author.

Keywords: Ryan Smithson, Iraq War narrative, American identity, military identity, interpellation

RYAN SMITHSON'IN *GHOSTS OF WAR* (2009) İSİMLİ IRAK SAVAŞI ANLATISINDA ÇELİŞKİLİ İFADELER: AMERİKAN KİMLİĞİ VE İDEOLOJİK SESLENME

ÖZ: Yaşam yazını Irak Savaşı'nda görev alan Amerikan askerleri için zengin bir temsil platformudur. Bu tür onlara istenmeyen kimlikleri reddetmek ve sahip olduklarına inandıkları veya sahip olmak istedikleri kimlikler üzerinde hak iddia etmek için ihtiyaç duydukları zemini sağlar. Amerikalı politikacılar ve askeri otorite figürleri, Irak Savaşı öncesinde, Amerikan askerlerine birtakım özellikler ve roller atfetmiştir. Bu "ideolojik seslenme" hem mesleki grup içinde hem de bireyin kendi içinde sembolik etkileşime yol açar ve yazarlar bu etkileşimin bir

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sonucu olarak davranışlarını belirtilen otorite figürlerinin Amerikan askeri için tanımladığı sembolik kimliğe göre şekillendirme doğrultusunda baskı altında hissederler. Ryan Smithson'ın Irak Savaşı anlatısı *Ghosts of War: The True Story of A 19- Year-Old GI* (Savaş Hayaletleri: On Dokuz Yaşında Bir ABD Silahlı Kuvvetler Mensubunun Gerçek Hikayesi) yazara biçilen özne pozisyonunun beraberinde nasıl bir ideolojik duruş dayattığını gösterir. Bu baskı savaşı destekleyen veya karşı tutum sergileyen birçok savaş anlatısında gözlemlenir. Ancak Smithson'un eserinde, diğer yazarların eserlerinden farklı olarak, anlatıcı "ben" ve anlatılan "ben" in Irak Savaşı ve Amerikan askeri tanımları çelişir. Bahsi geçen çelişki, eseri savaş öncesi ideolojik seslenmenin askerler üzerindeki etkisini gösteren kültürel açıdan önemli bir anı yazısı yapar. Anlatıcı "ben" ve anlatılan "ben" in birbiriyle çelişen kimlik tanımlarına odaklanırken sosyolojik bir kavram olan "ideolojik seslenme"den yararlanan bu makale, Smithson örneği üzerinden ideolojik seslenmenin kimlik oluşumu üzerindeki etkilerini analiz eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ryan Smithson, Irak Savaşı anlatısı, Amerikan kimliği, askeri kimlik, ideolojik seslenme

Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001, as Nancy Ehrenreich put it, rendered both male and female Americans "emasculated", a term she uses for those who experienced "a humiliating loss of power".¹ The events caused a move towards militarism and a longing for the "romanticized" view of soldiers who would display the greatness of the nation.² 9/11 instigated a re-masculinization of the nation. The "hegemonic masculinity" of the 1990s based on economic achievement was no longer valuable. In this new atmosphere, "strong men in uniform replaced corporate billionaires".³ Such a challenge on American masculinity was naturally going to breed images other than those of figures in uniforms. Action was required. Therefore, playing the "heroic rescuer" of Iraqi people and defining Saddam Hussein with a "toxic masculinity" would help to restore the "lost territory" of traditional masculinity.⁴ The male other would be "demonised, feminised and dehumanised", whereas the female other would be saved by the "morally and physically superior, and ultimately legitimate in pursuing military intervention".⁵ To complete the reconstruction of the national

¹ Nancy Ehrenreich, *Disguising Empire: Racialized Masculinity and the "Civilizing" of Iraq*, *Cleveland State Law Review* 52.131, 2004-2005, p. 132.

² Andrew J. Bacevic, *The New American Militarism, How Americans Are Seduced by War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 2.

³ Simona Sharoni, "To End the War, Listen to Soldiers", 14 March 2005. *counterpunch.org*. WEB. 25 March 2010, p. 151.

⁴ James W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinities and Camouflaged Politics: Unmasking the Bush Dynasty and Its War Against Iraq*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, p. 50.

⁵ Maryam Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror", *Global Change, Peace & Security* 23. 1, February 2011, pp. 27-28.

identity, the identity of the American soldier was soon realigned. “The Soldier’s Creed” which has been taken as the embodiment of the American soldier for so long was modified to adapt the American soldier to the post 9/11 environment. The original four lines—“I will always place the mission first. / I will never accept defeat. / I will never quit. / I will never leave a fallen comrade”—were expanded by General Schoomaker to eleven lines that hailed the American soldier as “a warrior”.⁶ Embodying the merits of “obedience, loyalty and physical and mental toughness”,⁷ which are suggestive of the traditional masculinity, the American soldier was now the “guardian of freedom and the American way of life”.⁸ The military was expected to be “a modern analogue to the frontier masculinity that allowed a man to test his physical and mental abilities—economic independence and breadwinner status, dominance and mastery through technology, and hybrid masculinity, which combines egalitarianism and compassion with strength and power”.⁹

During the war in Iraq (2003-2011), American politicians and military authorities have defined American soldiers as citizens who have certain characteristics and roles. Such interpellation¹⁰ leads to a symbolic interaction within the professional group as well as within individuals,

⁶ “Soldier’s Creed”, *The Official Homepage of United States Army*, n.d. *army.mil*. WEB. 14 May 2014, np.

⁷ Steven L. Gardiner, “The Warrior Ethos “Discourse and Gender in the United States Army since 9/11”, *War and Culture Studies Journal* 5. 3, 2012, p. 379.

⁸ “Soldier’s Creed”, np.

⁹ Melissa T. Brown, *Enlisting Masculinity: The Construction of Gender in US Military Recruiting Advertising during the All-Volunteer Force*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 5.

¹⁰ Althusser defines man as “an ideological animal by nature”. He thinks ideologies have a crucial role in the construction of identities. Individuals are encouraged to believe the politicians, religious leaders, family elders, school teachers are always right. They offer; if not force, individuals particular identities, normalize certain attitudes, behaviors and ideas so that people would internalize them without questioning. Althusser categorizes these agents of ideology by calling the army and the police as “repressive state apparatuses” since they function through punishment and violence while calling schools, families and churches as “ideological state apparatuses”, as institutions transmitting ideology. When the politicians say an American soldier or an American citizen behaves in a certain way, for example, they interpellate certain roles to these soldiers and citizens. Althusser calls the process of transforming individuals into subjects “hailing” or “interpellation”. If the subject internalizes the definitions given in relation to the subject position that ideology presupposes and performs accordingly, s/he automatically becomes one of its subjects. Althusser believes that this is the key to becoming subjects of an ideology. See “On the Reproduction of the Conditions of Production”, 1970, “*Lenin and Philosophy*” and *Other Essays*, Trans. Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press 1971, *marksist.org*. WEB. 11 May 2013.

making the authors feel the pressure to fit their behavior in the symbolic definition of the American provided by the authorities. In Ryan Smithson's 2009 Iraq War memoir *Ghosts of War: The True Story of A 19-Year-Old GI*, being interpellated into a certain subject position forces Smithson into an ideological position. Many war narratives reflect this pressure whether or not they support the war. In Smithson's memoir, however, the narrating "I" and the narrated "I" contradict with one another about the way they view the war and the American soldier. Focusing on these contradicting depictions and making use of the sociological conception of interpellation, this article will analyze the role of interpellation in the identity formation of the author.

Reading Ryan Smithson's *Ghosts of War* with a Focus on Identity Formation

Ryan Smithson's 2009 memoir presents the Iraq War experience of a nineteen-year old soldier. The author defines his work as a memoir that is made up of "words we use every day", but claims that they are the "words of a heart, the silhouettes of a generation". He calls his words as "[his] silhouettes", where, in between them, there is "the resilient silence of humanity... [his] silence".¹¹ His definition could be interpreted as a claim of having written a universal testimony on the war. The cover of the work presents Smithson as a silhouette which is fading away with a dissatisfied look on his face, as if he is a "ghost of war" befitting the title of his work. The title, together with the cover designed for the memoir, cause the readers expect an anti-war memoir. Yet, the nature of the memoir proves to be ambiguous with the rhetorical question "If I don't do something, who will?" on the cover, a question which suggests that the author has internalized the role offered for the American soldier. The incongruity between these key elements of the book cover foreshadows the contradicting definitions of identity in the work.

The memoir is divided into three parts under the main titles "Red Phase", "White Phase" and "Blue Phase", bringing together the colors of the American flag. These phases refer to the first three weeks of sacrificing freedom for learning one's duty; the second three weeks of learning the meaning of freedom, love of mission, heroism, camaraderie and dealing with pressure; and the last weeks of learning humility, that "no one is ever prepared for war".¹² The tone of the memoir, interestingly, shifts from bitter and cynical to affirmative and propagandistic.

¹¹ Ryan Smithson, *Ghosts of War: The True Story of A 19-Year-Old GI*, New York: Harper/Teen, 2009, p. 301.

¹² Ibid., pp. 33-34.

Smithson decides to write the memoir thanks to the encouragement of a college professor who helps him compile his writings into a book.¹³ The book is a worthy read for its display of the transformation of the would-be-soldiers through the military training experience. Before he joins the military, Smithson sees freedom as “responsibility” and he “wasn’t sure if [he] was ready for all that”.¹⁴ During what he calls the red phase of basic training, however, he claims having learnt to “appreciate freedom”, because he lacked it.¹⁵ During the white phase, he develops a sense of belonging to the group. In the blue phase, finally, internalization of the given ideology via interpellation is complete. The boot camp experience narrated by the author proves to be an experience that changes how the narrator defines himself. Therefore, reading the memoir in relation to the influence of interpellation on identity formation would be relevant.

The Influence of the Boot Camp Experience on Smithson’s Identity Formation

Smithson’s narrated “I” in the beginning of the memoir often complains about the way soldiers are treated by the military authorities and is anxious about the process he is supposed to go through. However, as the narrative unfolds, his stance towards the war and his perception of self changes. The basic training at home subjected Smithson to a systematic brainwashing. Smithson thinks it turns him and his fellow soldiers into “pieces of equipment in an assembly line”,¹⁶ who are “worthless”, whose “mommy ain’t there” and who “are no different than any other rotting piece of compost in army fatigues”, who “are not wanted”, whose recruiters lied to [them]”, and who “should just go home”, since even “God Himself” cannot save them now.¹⁷ Now that the soldiers’ perceptions of self are completely “destroyed” and their clothes are taken and camouflage is given in exchange “to hide who [they] are and to make out of them ‘An Army of One’”, the transformation begins:

“They take who we are and flatten it, everything we think we know about it. They take it away so all we’re left is each other and the hair on our chinny-chin-chins. Then they give us a razor blade and tell us to shave Sitting in the barbershop chair, we get the hair cut off our heads like dogs at the vet. We watch in the mirror as our identity floats to the ground. We watch as the barber sweeps it up, puts it in the trash. Right where it belongs. The hair of a hundred

¹³ Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

recruits, a hundred other identities mixing and blending until they are all the same. We're all the same.”¹⁸

In the description of the military training experience above, the soldiers lose their identities composed of the ethnic, cultural, religious, political, intellectual and social and are given an occupational identity which is to be fed with the national identity discourse. The narrated “**T**” is depicted to be anonymized through the process of erasing the notions that makes him a specific person. He favors this process as part of an attempt at making soldiers realize the importance of freedom for human beings, despite the fact that the tone of the quotation suggests a leaning more towards a complaint. In other words, as the narrating “**T**” of the text complains about the treatment during the basic training, the narrated “**T**”, under the influence of the interpellation, depicts the treatment as a necessary and crucial one for the sake of serving the nation. Smithson defines this phase as one which is “about reflection ... about looking around and realizing how much all this means. This ground, this place we call a home. The space and time given to us for free. These people we call country men. And the way it feels to lose it all, to lose our free will”.¹⁹ Yet, his dissatisfaction is obvious when he depicts the way soldiers are being told “when to train when to push and when to pull, when to laugh (never) and when to cry (don’t even think about it) ... and how to talk and how to sit and how to eat, and when to shower and when to shit” as part of the learning of duty which is “opposite of freedom”.²⁰ If they sacrificed freedom, they would understand the worth of freedom and why they should fight, since the Iraq War aims to give Iraqi people freedom.²¹ Still, the narrating “**T**” cannot help but come up with a cynical depiction of the American soldier: “‘I serve my country’ is tattooed right across my forehead. I am a part of the all warrior circus. We are snarling clowns with spiked teeth and bleeding gums. We smell like rotten war paint”.²² As the quotation reveals, the narrating “**T**”, contrary to the narrated “**T**”, who is depicted as a defender of freedom, depicts Smithson as nothing more than “the property of the U.S. government”.²³ The discontent narrating “**T**” makes a more pessimistic comment about his low self-esteem and lack of free will in the following lines:

“I am only one of these simple GIs, and I am nothing special. I am a copy of

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 6-28.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

²¹ Ibid., p. 34.

²² Ibid., p. 34.

²³ Ibid., p. 155.

*a copy of a copy. I'm that vague, illegible, pink sheet on the very bottom of carbon paper stacks. They will not make movies about me. There will be no video games revolving around my involvement in the war. When people write nonfiction books about the Iraq War, about the various battles and changes of command, I will not be in them. My unit will not be mentioned. We are not going to be part of any significant turning point in the war. We're not going to bust down doors and search for weapons caches. We're construction. We're going to build crap. We're not going to hunt for insurgents. Our job is to stay away from the enemy. Our job is small, a minute part of the larger picture. And I'm not even sure what this "larger picture" means. I'm not sure why we invaded Iraq. I am just a GI. Nothing special. A kid doing my job. A veritable Joe Schmo of the masses, of my generation. I am GI Joe Schmo."*²⁴

The quotation presents the narrator's position in the war, making him think that his dreams of "accomplishment" in any field of life²⁵ and his wish of becoming a hero are impossible to come true. The narrated "I" early in the memoir is described as "the average teenager" in Greenbush, New York. He is depicted to have blond hair and blue eyes and is "smaller than average build". Like the rest of the high school students, Smithson is also narrated to be a "wannabe" who dream of being "rich", "cool", "hot", "tough" and "self-confident".²⁶ His fictional heroes are "those valiant, stone-jawed warriors in World War II and Vietnam flicks. Maybe Matt Damon or Mel Gibson Maybe Willem Dafoe or Charlie Sheen".²⁷ For him life is "boring as hell"²⁸ and high school is "so typical and predictable".²⁹ Members of his generation are desperately "trying to be something" they are not and thus, "restricting" their identities³⁰ so much that even the "nonconformists conform".³¹ In the beginning of his final year in college, Smithson "dread[s] going back to school" and wants to avoid "making all the decisions about the future".³² He wants to "stay a kid" and delay the "real world" and taxes and mortgages and bills and insurance" for as long as he could. Still, he "long[s] for a purpose".³³ When he ruins his knee, he loses his chance to become a wrestler—his "last chance for

²⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 232-233.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

³¹ Ibid., p. 5.

³² Ibid., pp. 8-9.

³³ Ibid., p. 8.

accomplishment”.³⁴

9/11 occurs at a time when he longs for something that is “atypical, unpredictable, kind of real”.³⁵ From that point on, the narrated “**I**” is depicted as a young man who feels that his generation has a “responsibility to do something”.³⁶ Yet, despite coming from a family of soldiers, he decides to be a “weekend warrior”,³⁷ which would refute his latter claims on taking responsibility for his generation. For the narrating “**I**” of the earlier parts of the memoir, being a “weekend warrior” is nothing more than a cure for purposelessness, a job which poses no risks, since he would not be fighting and would be “doing reconstruction”.³⁸ Weekend warriors or the reserves usually drill one weekend per month and join a two-week mandatory annual training.³⁹ Yet, the situation changes when the Iraq War begins. He is to be stationed in Iraq. Smithson records feeling “trapped in rubble” and so much under pressure that he feels as if the Twin Towers “fell on [him]”.⁴⁰ To add to this, “[t]here was no easy way out” of service, since “desertion equals jail time” during times of war⁴¹ and one cannot “respectfully decline”.⁴² As his reaction shows, his feelings about war obviously do not harbor heroism in them. Still, the narrating “**I**” of the rest of the memoir would attribute a heroic mission to the narrated “**I**” and declares his decision of “[e]nlisting, volunteering, giving oneself for the greater good”⁴³ and “abandon[ing] [his] family in the name of [his] country”,⁴⁴ at the expense of contradicting with the negative reflections depicted earlier.

The Function of Interpellation in Smithson’s War Experience: Self-Regulation

Starting from the beginning of Smithson’s memoir, his involvement in the army is associated with the patriotic cause of protecting the country. The reason why he has decided to join the reserves is explained in these words: “My country had been attacked. My people had been attacked. Enlisting, volunteering, giving oneself for the greater good: that’s what you’re

³⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 294.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴² Ibid., p. 44.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

supposed to do in this situation. So I did it".⁴⁵ His visit to the Ground Zero after the attacks is depicted to emphasize the same mission claimed:

*"These tears for injustice, for impurity, for virtue, for love, for hate, for misunderstanding, for innocence, for guilt, for nothing, and for everything And that's the problem I saw. America had given up. And that's why the World Trade Center was allowed to fall. If I don't do something, who will? I thought. I stopped crying. A month later I left for basic training."*⁴⁶

Despite the fact that the narrated "I" is presented as a patriotic American in the quotation above, in the same section of the book titled "Basic Training Part I", the narrating "I" describes being in Iraq in words that contradict with the earlier enthusiastic mood adopted. He describes himself as the property of the "military world" where there is not a "neat little dotted line where one can write *I respectfully decline*".⁴⁷ These words imply that he is doing what he does because he has no other choice—a fact that conflict with the narrating "I"'s earlier claim of practicing free will in taking part in the mission. According to what the quotation suggests, Smithson regulates his behaviors according to the expectations in order to remain a respected member of the military community. He talks to the figures of authority even in their absence, which shows that he constantly feels in between the expectations and his own feelings. "Suck it up, I tell my mirror self like a drill sergeant", he says and goes on: "I'm not doing this for you".⁴⁸ Although he claims that he is doing what he does for the sake of his country, it is obvious that he has an inner conflict between his feelings and the expectations of the authority figures such as the drill sergeant. The narrating "I", at this point, tries to view war and service from the point of view of the drill sergeant, antagonizing his critical and reluctant self in order to adapt his behaviors to the norms.

In the same section of the memoir, again in contradiction with the earlier claims of being a voluntary participant in the military action, being in Iraq is portrayed as "being on a new planet. It's something other people do like curing world hunger. It's something that's not supposed to happen in real life. Not to [him]. It's getting AIDS. It's being broken down".⁴⁹ Moreover, he feels Americans are "occupying" Iraq; hears that the CNN says the occupation is "wrong", and "on some level, [he] know[s] it's wrong".⁵⁰ He

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

thinks that Americans are not wanted by the Iraqi people and that they hate him and “burn [his] flag and drag soldiers’ bodies through the streets”.⁵¹ At this point, he says, it is not his choice to be there either and that he is there “on order” at the expense of contradicting with his earlier claims on patriotic responsibility.⁵²

As Smithson’s words reveal, the narrating “**T**” of the text often contradicts with the narrated “**T**”, who is depicted by the narrating “**T**” himself as a soldier who has adopted the heroic mission of serving his country and people under attack. Even in the absence of direct interpellation by a figure of authority, the generally accepted definitions of the American and the American soldier cause the narrating “**T**” regulate his behaviors in order to fit in them. In the last days of his basic training, however, a case, in which interpellation is directed to Smithson in specific, takes place:

“The recruiter shuts the car off and looks me straight in the eye.

“Let me ask you something”, he says. “And be honest.” “Okay.”

“Do you appreciate your freedom?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Do you appreciate your freedom so much that you’re willing to fight for it?”

“Yes.”

“Okay”, he says. “Do you appreciate your freedom so much that you’re willing to fight for the freedom of others?”

I think for a moment, really trying to answer this question honestly.

“Yeah, I think so”, I say. “Yes.”

“That, Smithson”, he says, “is why you deserve to wear this uniform. And I’m telling you right now, if that’s really the way you feel, then the army needs more soldiers like you in Iraq.”

“Why?” I ask.

“Those people deserve to be free”, he says.

He’s looking me straight in the eye, but his eyes are not even in the vehicle.”⁵³

In the quotation above, his sergeant interpellates Smithson as a “defender of freedom” by asking him an almost rhetorical question. A negative response would surely not be appreciated by him. He declares Smithson to be the ideal American soldier of the Iraq War, who is willing to fight for other people’s freedom. This definition fits in the discourse used by

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 76.

⁵² Ibid., p. 76.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 239-240.

politicians of the time to justify the Iraq War. The interpellation of the military authority figure is based, in this case, partly on the interpellation of politicians, whom stand for the "state apparatus" in Althusser's terms.⁵⁴ American politicians of the time favored strong and decisive leaders and Americans who are in unison with the government in terms of their approach to the war. Americans were victimized and the enemy was demonized. Revenge and punishment was necessary. The war was symbolically constructed "into a worldview"⁵⁵ against an ambiguous group of enemies and an abstract notion of terrorism. The equation unfolded like this: supporting the war was patriotic; those who were not supportive were thus unpatriotic. Heroes are patriotic; therefore, in order to become heroes, service members had to support the war as well as the decisions of the government. The definition of heroism was expanded to include people working in fire or emergency services or people donating blood.⁵⁶ Such an unwritten judgment system based on a play with symbols attempted "to bridge divided identities and reduce conflict and to eliminate critical approaches to governmental policies".⁵⁷ This outlook caused some service members to keep their views about the war to themselves, since they did not want to be marginalized in their national and military group.

The rhetoric mentioned above was also influential on Smithson's memoir. Smithson's narrated "I" of the beginning of the memoir is depicted as a soldier who is unwilling to take responsibility. Yet, once he is interpellated by the sergeant, he tends to perceive himself as an independent agent rather than a passive subject of ideology. This misperception causes individuals to think that their decisions are autonomous which in turn provides the continuity of the system.⁵⁸ Interpellation, therefore, causes a misrecognition of the self.⁵⁹

From the viewpoint of structural symbolic interactionism, which views social life in small local or institutional circles, society is made up of "organized systems of interactions and role relationships and as complex mosaics of differentiated groups, communities, and institutions, cross-cut by

⁵⁴ L. Althusser, np.

⁵⁵ David Altheide, "Consuming Terrorism", *Symbolic Interaction* 27. 3, 2004, p. 292.

⁵⁶ Jon Robert Adams, *Male Armor: The Soldier Hero in Contemporary American Culture (Cultural Frames Framing Culture)*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008. pp. 17-18.

⁵⁷ A. David Butz, "National Symbols as Agents of Psychological and Social Change", *Political Psychology* 30. 5, 2009, p. 779.

⁵⁸ M. Kazancı, "Althusser, İdeoloji ve İletişimin Dayanılmaz Ağırlığı", *AÜ Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* 57.1, 2002, p. 60.

⁵⁹ L. Althusser, np.

a variety of demarcations based on class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.”⁶⁰ The military is a perfect example to this type of institutional circle. According to the symbolic interactionist approach of Erving Goffman, the definition of a certain situation determines the identities of the members of the group. Each member, in order to be part of the group, accepts the definitions provided and agree to behave accordingly.⁶¹ In Smithson’s case, the situation defined is the war itself and the narrator, regardless of his attitude toward the war, tries to fit in the role determined for him by the military group embodied by the sergeant. In Herbert Blumer’s terms, Smithson engages in “joint actions” that are “repetitive and stable.”⁶² The identities adopted are often valid in a specific place, which is the Iraqi warfront. The members have to behave in certain ways within the confines of this place, unless ordered otherwise. At the end of this process, individuals internalize the characteristics attributed to the members of the group. Identities are mutually decided upon, once roles are adopted.⁶³ As symbolic interactionism based on Goffman’s theatrical model suggests, a team is a set of individuals who agree upon a group of definitions.⁶⁴ Every member of the group knows that their fellows do not originally have the required qualities as in the case of Smithson. Yet, they assume that everyone actually “possess” these qualities.⁶⁵ At some point, performers themselves also consider their fostered behaviors as real, becoming both performers and the audience of their behaviors.⁶⁶ As the memoir proceeds, Smithson’s attitude is observed to parallel Goffman’s model.

Once the basic training is over, Smithson appears to have regulated his behaviors according to the ideal American soldier image drawn by the sergeant and this, in turn, changes his descriptions of the narrated “I”. The narrated “I”, has now internalized the given ideology via interpellation, even if, from time to time, the feelings and experiences reflected by the narrating “I” point to a dissatisfaction with military training as well as the war experience that would follow. Yet, the adopted identity makes individuals respond to certain cases in “expected” ways as a result of imagining possible

⁶⁰ S. Stryker, *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*, Menlo Park, CA/Caldwell, NJ: Benjamin-Cummings/Blackburn, 1980-2000. p. 19.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶² Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969, p. 17.

⁶³ S. Stryker, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Life in Everyday Life*, New York: Anchor Books, 1959, p. 64.

⁶⁵ R. Smithson, p. 10.

⁶⁶ E. Goffman, p. 49.

reactions to certain stimuli.⁶⁷ This is called self-regulation. The boot camp, in the light of this definition, could be considered as the platform of learning about self-regulation under the repressive control of the “military apparatus”.⁶⁸ Symbolic interactionists agree upon the existence of two forms of self-regulation. The first occurs at significant-other-related situations, and the second occurs as a result of “strategic responses aimed at defending the self and one’s relationship in the face of threat”.⁶⁹ The significant others are Smithson’s fellow soldiers and the military authority figures and the threat mentioned could be a punishment of some sort. Goffman, in his famous work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), names the target of such threat: the strength and definition of the team.⁷⁰ In order not to be criticized or condemned, the member would engage in “joint actions” to fit in the group. Likewise, Smithson fulfills the requirements of his role in order to protect himself, since answering sergeant’s question negatively or not embracing the “common” cause would automatically make him a “bad” soldier, as well as an “unAmerican”, inhumane or an indifferent one. In the process of self-regulation, the “me”, of the individual identity is shaped by the “I” taking into consideration the expectations, definitions and symbols created by significant others such as the family, ancestors and religious/political authorities/institutions. In short, there is no “me” at birth. V. M. Ames’ explanation of the relationship between the “I” and the “me” might be useful at this point:

“The “I” is spontaneous, impulsive, ceaselessly venturing, not only out in the world, but confronting the “me” in dialogue. The “me” is the result of dealing with other people. It is an internalization of the community, with its institutions, whereas “I” remains more isolated, more untamed, though cautioned and controlled by the “me”. On the other hand, the “me” is constantly prodded by the “I” which breaks away to say and do more as less unexpected things in society; while society in turn is constantly being stirred up and tested by fresh impetus from the “I” of each of its members. The plunging and daring “I” is civilized and guided, also given opportunities, incentives and support by society. But there is always an unstable equilibrium between society, representing what has been achieved or bugled in the

⁶⁷ Richard D. Ashmore and Lee Jussim, eds., *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues*, Vol. 1. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 107.

⁶⁸ L. Althusser, np.

⁶⁹ Seth J. Schwartz, et al. eds., *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, Vol. 1. New York: Springer, 2011, p. 158.

⁷⁰ E. Goffman, p. 51.

past, and exploring reforming, revolutionary “I”. This sets the problem and promise of education confronting parents and teachers, and statesmen.”⁷¹

Ames’ explanation confirms the definition of life writing proposed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, according to which, the “**I**” of symbolic interactionism is the active narrating “**I**” and the “**me**” is the passive narrated “**I**”. It is the ideological “**I**” of Smith and Watson that causes the “**I**” of symbolic interactionism to shape the “**me**” in the manner explained above.⁷² In parallel to the process of developing relational identities, many scholars in the field of life writing agree that autobiographical acts are “relational” or “routed through others”.⁷³ Befitting the view point of symbolic interactionism, the “**me**” (the narrated “**I**”) of Smithson’s memoir has become what it is as a “result of dealing with the other people”.⁷⁴ He is “constantly prodded by the ‘I’” (the narrating “**I**”) and does “less unexpected things” due to being interpellated,⁷⁵ while the “**I**” (the narrating “**I**”) of the text is “spontaneous, impulsive, ceaselessly venturing”, “out in the world”, “isolated, more untamed though cautioned and controlled by the ‘me’” since it follows the “joint actions” of the military group he identifies with.⁷⁶ Interpellation transforms Smithson into a subject through internalization of the identity promoted and causes a “misrecognition of the self”.⁷⁷ Through sergeant’s interpellation, who is the embodiment of the repressive state apparatus, ideology is spread by coercive force.⁷⁸

By the end of the narrative, as a result of interpellation, Smithson gives an unflinching definition for his identity. Now, the narrating “**I**” presents the narrated “**I**” as the ideal American soldier, fitting in the definitions provided by American politicians and military authorities mentioned earlier:

“What will you say to your mother, your child, your wife when they say, ‘You know, I’m really upset that you’re still in the military?’” asks the readjustment expert.

“So am I”, I say.

⁷¹ V. M. Ames, “No Separate Self”, *The Philosophy of George Herbert Mead*, Ed. W.R. Corti, Winterhur, Switzerland: Amiswiler Bucherie, 1973, pp. 51-52.

⁷² Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 72.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁷⁴ V. M. Ames, p. 51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁷ L. Althusser, np.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, np.

My response breaks the blank stares, and the room erupts in laughter. Then, pretending to be my family again, he asks me, "Well, then, honey, why are you still in?"

*"Because it's our duty", someone says.
And that's it."*⁷⁹

The quotation provides a definition of Smithson's claimed identity. In it, he presents himself as *the* American soldier for whom duty matters more than anything else. The narrated "I", in the final pages of the memoir, is depicted to have completely internalized the given ideology via interpellation, and is depicted as a soldier that has gone to war "because of the bazooona cat" an Iraqi child has given him—"a rabbit's foot that resembles a cat"—in exchange for a bottle of Gatorade. The quotation suggests that he has taken part in the war for the sake of the children in Iraq and the children of his country.⁸⁰ Giving up his previously questioning attitude towards the war, the narrated "I" of the end of the memoir turns to a cliché and claims having lost his "innocence of childhood" as a result of the war.⁸¹

He also dwells on religion to justify both the war and the identity he claims, religion being another ideological state apparatus at work during the war.⁸² Throughout the narrative, Smithson is skeptical about drill sergeants' stance on religion and quotes them saying "There's no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole".⁸³ In the end, however, he acknowledges that there is "something out there bigger than [himself]".⁸⁴ He says he is "grateful for war, for the ghosts for the worst in humanity, because it's the closest [he]'ll ever get to understanding the best in humanity".⁸⁵ His words suggest that he thinks the evil in others has brought out the best in him and his fellow soldiers. He also realizes that "God is the one with a sick sense of humor", which he thinks makes the soldiers "Godlike".⁸⁶ As these words of his reveal, the narrating "I", in this section of the memoir, acknowledges the existence of God, and while doing so, claims part of His power as an American soldier himself. Mentioning the potential he sees in himself to "save the world",⁸⁷ the narrated "I", to the readers' surprise, describes his relation to the war with reference to religion.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 282-283.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 207, 305-306.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 297.

⁸² Ibid., np.

⁸³ R. Smithson, p. 307

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 308.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 309.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 250-251.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 308.

Conclusion

Through the process of telling life stories, authors, consciously or unconsciously, shape and reshape their identities. Therefore, Smithson's narrative could be read "for what it does" as well as what it says, since through the identity making process, works of life writing "encode or reinforce particular values in ways that may shape culture and history".⁸⁸

American politicians and military authorities have attributed Americans soldiers certain characteristics and roles before and during the war in Iraq. Such interpellation leads to a symbolic interaction within the group as well as within oneself, making the authors feel pressured about fitting their behaviors in the symbolic definition of the American provided by these authorities. In Ryan Smithson's 2009 Iraq War memoir *Ghosts of War: The True Story of A 19-Year-Old GI*, being interpellated into a heroic American soldier forces him into the ideological position of supporting the war and the American mission. Many war narratives reflect this pressure whether or not they support the war. In Ryan Smithson's memoir, however, the narrating "I" and the narrated "I" contradict with one another about the way they view the Iraq War and the American soldier. These contradictions result from interpellation and make the memoir a culturally significant work revealing the influence of prewar interpellation on the American soldier. It is possible to observe the influence of interpellation on identity formation in *Ghost of War* by focusing on the contradicting depictions of the narrating and narrated "I"s and making use of the sociological conception of interpellation.

Once interpellation takes place, Smithson claims "the role of generalized others".⁸⁹ His memoir narrates the process in which American soldiers are, in Blumer's words, "created, affirmed, transformed and cast aside".⁹⁰ In order to keep his anonymity, to be labeled fit, to be included or respected, Smithson adjusts his behaviors to the behavioral patterns of the group. In other words, he engages in self-regulation, even if he cannot completely "silence" his narrating "I" in the memoir. The silhouette he draws in the narrative, places the narrated "I" of the text as the "ghost of the war" who is "everywhere and nowhere" in the text befitting the ideological "I" it is the product of.

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⁸⁸ qtd. in S. Smith and Watson, p. 19.

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