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### The Perspective of War in the Play *Black Watch*

It is usually difficult to find universal explanations for complex social phenomena. This principle also applies to modern warfare. Through different perspectives, each group or individual who participates in the war finds their own objectives, benefits, and explanation for the war, where the differences in those perspectives could easily lead to conflicts and contradictions. The play of *Black Watch* demonstrates the 42 highlanders' physical and emotional involvement in the recent Iraq War through the perspectives from news reporters, soldiers, and politicians. As their motivations and interests in the war originate from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences, conflicts in their views tend to be inevitable. Although the plot of the play largely addresses the conflicts by rendering separate stories and memories of each character, I believe that the true value of the play lies in its demonstration that the war could not be fully understood from a single angle. Rather, the play educates its audiences that to truly understand the complexity and the sociocultural impact of the war as a whole, one needs to view it from a broader and combined perspective from the thoughts of multiple individuals.

In the play, if one observes each soldier's perspective of war separately, it appears that they fight for different causes. At the end of the play, Cammy claims that he fights for his regiment, while his other fellow soldiers claim that they instead fight for their company, platoon, section, and mates. Although these motivations could all be understood as to fight for a particular

group of people, the size of the groups are mentioned in a decreasing order. One major difference among the groups is that the concept of regime could be more abstract and conceptual, while the concept of sections and mates are more concrete. In fact, regiment means something beyond just a large group of soldiers to Cammy. The history of the Black Watch is more important to Cammy than his other fellow soldiers in the play because Cammy's father and grandfather also joined the Black Watch and fought wars they were proud of. Cammy joined the Black Watch with the expectation of fighting the war in the same courageous and glorious way his ancestors did. He believes that the history of the Black Watch should be connected and the future and present of the regiment should inherit its history: "what a regiment is all about? It's history. The Golden Thread. That's what the old timers go on about. It's what connects the past, the present, the future" (Burke 48). According to Cammy, fighting was used to be fun, a sort of sport and "relaxation" that the highlanders enjoyed when they fought all over the world; however, the Iraq War did not give the Black Watch soldiers the same joy as they were not fighting the way they were trained to fight. The history is thus disconnected, and causes Cammy to lose faith in the goal and purpose of his regiment in the Iraq War, and consequentially he no longer knows what he is fighting for. It is clear that Cammy's motivation to fight differs from simply fighting for mates, but if the soldiers' different motivations and goals to fight are viewed from a broader perspective, they are in fact unified in the way that most soldiers fight for trust and cohesion within the battle groups during the war.

According to Wong, unit cohesion is the primary combat motivation during the war. He points out that one of the most important benefits of unit cohesion is to provide the soldiers with the confidence and assurance that someone they trust could cover their back during battle (1). However, the trust not only happens on the interpersonal level. Wong concluded that today's

soldiers also need to trust their leaders and their army in order to understand and pursue the moral direction of war, and most soldiers are fully aware of the moral reasons to fight in the war (22). Based on Wong's study, Cammy and his fellow soldiers share the same perspective of trust to either the regime or their comrades. Cammy's disappointment of the regime could be therefore viewed as the disappointment of not being able to fight a war under the promised tradition of The Golden Thread, which was what he and his ancestors trusted when joining the army. His decision to leave the regime ultimately reflects the loss of his trust to the army. Therefore, by leveraging each character's own combat motivation to the perspective of trust and group cohesion, one finds that Cammy and other soldiers indeed fight for a non-conflicting goal. This is harder to conclude if one merely view each soldier's fighting motivation independently, which only gives a partial picture of the war.

Similarly, understanding the overall reason for an army's participate in war requires viewing the war from multiple perspectives. In the play, the word "bully" was addressed by Cammy multiple times, emphasizing his opinion that the whole purpose of his army in the Iraq war was to bully other countries: "This isnay fucking fighting. This is just plain old-fashioned bullying" (Burke 23). Clearly, Cammy believes that bullying is not fighting, but Rossco instead thinks "It's good to be the bully" and "bullying is the job." These conflicted views raise the question of the real differences between bullying and fighting, and whether "fighting" is a more noble military goal than "bullying". The play implicitly gives an answer to this question. Since Cammy is the major character who establishes the emotional experience of the play, the audiences might be biased to assume that bullying is indeed wrong within the context of previous battles in the history of the Black Watch. However, from a broader historical perspective while using the historical evidences outside the play, the Black Watch army being "Big Bullies" could

in fact only be considered as Cammy's personal opinion, which is an incomplete view of the regiment.

Historically, the Black Watch performed non-highland military missions, which usually involved invading other countries to fulfill political and economic purposes. The recruiting messages to the soldiers were not always to defend the enemies, but frequently advertised as economical reliefs for their families (Mackillop 16-20). It means that the reason the soldiers joined the army was not always as noble as Cammy thinks. According to David Archibald, The Black Watch has been a perfect example of an army deployed primarily for reasons of economic goals (8). He stated that the play only shows an alternative version of the historical reality of the Black Watch in the way that it made few explanations about the reasons the Black Watch did the military excursions. Archibald claims that the play renders the war to the audiences that the Black Watch's participation in the Iraq war was an aberration from its history, but in fact the 300 hundred years of the Black Watch's history largely consists of oversea imperial subjugations (The Drouth 9). This implies that the Iraq War was not an aberration of the Black Watch's military practice at all, and bullying is probably what successful wars are exactly about, where the differences in battle kits matters and using superior weapons and political strategies is probably very crucial to win the war. Archibald also shows clearly that the glorious impression of the Golden Thread of the Black Watch shown in the play does not describe the exact truth. It proves that emphasizing the Black Watch as "Big Bully" only reflects Cammy's personal feeling about what an ideal army should not do or not do. In other words, some soldiers of the Black Watch might enjoy the fact that their army is able to bully other countries and are proud of using the extraordinary war equipment that gives them better protection and reduces casualties. It is not

hard to see that by viewing from a historical perspective outside the play and Cammy's identity, one could find a completely different explanation about the concept of "Big Bully".

Probably the source of all conflicts in the play is the disagreement between the interests of the Black Watch soldiers and the authorities of the army who made the decision to redeploy the Black Watch to the Triangle of Death. In the soldiers' perspective, they were supposed to go home before Thanksgiving but only found out that they were airlifted from the Basra region to Iraq's Triangle of Death. The Black Watch soldiers expressed anger and thought the action was unjustified, as one soldier said: "I was supposed to be going home last Monday and I only found out that I was being deployed four days before ... Finding out just days before I was due to go home is hard to take" (Brown). In the play, the Scottish public and the families of the soldiers were said to be able to contrast the bravery of the soldiers with the duplicity and chicanery of the politicians who sent them into this deployment (Burke 27). One could easily tell that the anger and fear of the soldiers directly point to the military authorities. It seems like both the public and the soldiers regarded the redeployment as an inconsiderate military action for unjustifiable political interests, which put their army in great but unnecessary danger. However, this does not necessarily agree with the perspectives of the military commanders and the allies of the British army.

Redeployment is a frequent military operation during wars. In the play, the Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond, while facing with the public doubts to the redeployment decision for the Black Watch, defends that the operation is a straightforward military request with no political purpose. In fact, the US and British forces had formed a strong ally in the battlefield of Iraq since 2003, and the Black Watch was deployed ten months after US and British Army already involved in the intensive military operations in the city of Basra, where six

other British regiments were actively participating in the battle (Royle 221). Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon insisted that the deployment of the Black Watch was requested directly by US commanders. He said that the redeployment happens only on the military to military channel, and is part of the routine military collaborations between allies (Cardiff). Geoff's claim implies that the deployment is a necessary operation to assist their ally, which in fact contributed to the military operations of the US Marines. According to the US Marines spokesman Captain David, the arrival of the Black Watch was proved to be invaluable to the US operation. He commented that the Black Watch have assimilated faster than any unit he has had the opportunity to command (Black Watch face). After the Black Watch left Iraq, when the U.S. military took control of the "triangle of death" again, the operations officer of 2d Battalion, 24th Marines said: "With the Black Watch gone you allow the enemy to operate more freely. I can control some of the area they vacated, but definitely not all of it. (With British)" Clearly, the request of deploying the Black Watch temporarily to the Triangle of Death was due to US Marine's inability to control the area after they diverged their attention to other trouble hotspots in Babil. The Black Watch's close coordination was essential to their U.S. ally, and from the US Marine's perspective, it is by no means unnecessary.

Given the fact that theatre performances could only demonstrate a limited number of characters and tell stories within relatively short timeframes during the play, the interconnections among the different perspectives may be difficult to observe by the audiences. The scope of the perspectives of the characters may also be limited. The play of *Black Watch* provides the audiences an instructive insight that using a single perspective to look at the war may lead to biased understandings of the war. The multiple perspectives shown in the play persuade the

audiences that it is insufficient to appreciate the full complexity of war from limited angles, and encourages the audiences to perceive the war with broader contexts.

In general, the play reminds the audiences of the importance to switch their perspectives to look at complex social phenomena, and make them realize that the information directly included a play might only contribute to a partial understanding of some social issue. The audiences should always be aware that the contradictions and conflicts in the views of some characters in a play could be possibly reduced, eliminated, or completely inverted if they see them from different perspectives. It also provides the important insight for the audience that changing view angles and referring relevant facts outside the theatre performance are the necessary processes to appreciate the whole picture of a theatre topic.

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