**Afghanistan, Soldiers’ Experiences and Literary Invention in Dirk Kurbjuweit *Kriegsbraut* (2011) and Norbert Scheuer *Die Sprache der Vögel* (2015)**

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This article examines how recent literary texts have sought to represent the experience of German soldiers in Afghanistan in the deployment of the Bundeswehr to NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) after 2001. This deployment proved increasingly controversial in the FRG and from the late 2000s reverberated through cultural production. Literary representations were published into a discursive field already shaped by a proliferation of soldiers’ accounts of ISAF, which as military memoirs laid claim to a particular authority. In readings of Dirk Kurbjuweit’s *Kriegsbraut* (2011) and Norbert Scheuer’s more self-consciously literary *Die Sprache der Vögel* (2015), the article offers a case study of the way two recent novels have drawn on and positioned themselves in relation to soldiers’ accounts of their experience. Both novels offer an affirmation of the power of literary invention to cast this experience in a fresh light and the article explores the very different strategies by which they do so.

Keywords: Afghanistan; ISAF; soldiers’ experience; military memoir, literary invention; Dirk Kurbjuweit; Norbert Scheuer

The Bundeswehr’s deployment to Afghanistan in NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from 2001 to 2014 has been the most substantial of several ‘out-of-area’ deployments in a NATO and/or UN context since 1990. Under a UN mandate and with Bundestag approval, German soldiers were deployed to Kabul from late 2001 to secure conditions for the restoration of governance after the Taliban regime was overthrown. Their responsibility was extended to share with civilian teams the operation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Kunduz and Feyzabad (2003) and Mazar-i-Sharif (2004). Over 100,000 soldiers participated in ISAF, with only a reduced contingent staying to support the training of Afghan forces in operation Resolute Strength from 2015.[[1]](#footnote-1) 55 German soldiers were killed, 35 in attacks and in combat, 20 in other circumstances.[[2]](#footnote-2)

At home, the deployment became progressively more controversial as incidents in Afghanistan eroded public perceptions of a peaceful reconstructive mission. These included, early on, an attack on 7 June 2003 on a bus taking German troops to the airfield in Kabul to return home, which killed four soldiers. The actions of German soldiers in turn appeared in a problematic light when on 4 September 2009 a German officer called an air strike on two tanker lorries hijacked by insurgents, killing 142 people, mostly civilians.[[3]](#footnote-3) Taking stock in 2014, Dirk Kurbjuweit, editor of *Der Spiegel* and author of *Kriegsbraut* (2011), among the first novels about it, noted how, despite official denials and with much public soul-searching, the deployment had brought the language of war back into public discourse. By sending troops to support rebuilding and the establishment of democratic institutions and values, the FRG had wanted to change Afghanistan, but Afghanistan, for Kurbjuweit, had changed the FRG, ‘[ihre] Politik, die öffentliche Meinung, [ihr] Ansehen in der Welt’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The mounting controversy around the deployment reverberated through cultural production too in the late 2000s. First, films and TV movies including, respectively, *Nacht vor Augen* (Brigitte Bertele, 2008) and *Willkommen zuhause* (Andreas Senn, 2008) and a proliferation of memoirs by former Bundeswehr soldiers launched by Achim Wohlgethan’s *Endstation Kabul: Als deutscher Soldat in Afghanistan – ein Insiderbericht* (2008) and Heike Groos’s *Ein schöner Tag zum Sterben: Als Bundeswehrärztin in Afghanistan* (2009) vied to shape public perceptions. Literary treatments did not lag far behind, but significantly their representation of soldiers’ experiences appeared in a discursive field already shaped by soldiers’ memoirs and accounts. This article considers how literary discourse has situated itself in relation to soldiers’ accounts and what quality it has brought to the representation of their experiences. The article turns to two novels to explore how these as fictional treatments both draw on recent soldiers’ accounts and mobilise the potential of literary discourse in the face of the authority to which these accounts lay claim. Women were able to volunteer after 1975, but eligible for combat roles only after 2001 and the first text, Kurbjuweit’s *Kriegsbraut* focuses on a woman soldier of the Bundeswehr. It recounts Esther Dischereit’s deployment to Afghanistan, her affair with Mehsud, the headmaster of a girls’ school supported by the FRG, and how, echoing the air strike of 4 September 2009, she calls a strike which kills a woman and two children. In the second text, Norbert Scheuer’s *Die Sprache der Vögel* (2015), Paul Arimond’s diary of his experiences as a paramedic and a bird watcher is interwoven with narrative threads focusing on an ancestor who travelled to the Hindukush in 1776, the suicide of Paul’s father, and a former teacher who receives Paul’s diary after his injury, in an incident recalling 7 June 2003, when his bus is bombed. Like the films by Bertele and Senn and the memoirs of Wohlgethan and Groos, both novels play at a perceived turning point, at the moment of a loss of innocence for a post-unification Germany in which the argument for deploying troops had been made on humanitarian grounds. For Kurbjuweit, it was in 2006 that conditions facing the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan turned visibly hostile and the deployment slid, despite official avoidance of the term, into war; for Scheuer this already occurred in 2003-2004. While *Kriegsbraut* also reflects themes of Kurbjuweit’s journalism about ISAF what is striking is how both novels validate the authenticity of their representation of soldiers’ experiences by drawing on soldiers’ first-hand accounts in interviews and memoirs. In Western culture, the tradition of soldiers’ accounts claims a unique authority arising from the experience of the battlefield, though in Germany after 1945 this tradition is also a fraught one. The article examines the different strategies the novels use to position themselves in relation to it and its claims by affirming the power of literary invention and casting its elements in fictional form, with Kurbjuweit’s novel adopting a critical stance towards the tropes of the military memoir and Scheuer’s more self-consciously literary novel exploiting the ambiguity of literary discourse in the interplay of its narratives.

Where scholarship has developed a more nuanced picture of the representation in film and television of the deployment of the Bundeswehr in ISAF, work on literary representations has remained more general. With respect to film and TV, scholars soon identified how, in Bertele’s *Nacht vor Augen* and Senn’s *Willkommen zuhause* in 2008, homecoming narratives modelled after US Vietnam films (e.g. Hal Ashby’s *Coming Home*, 1978) initially used Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a figure to ‘bring home’ the reality of a mission seen as misunderstood in Germany.[[5]](#footnote-5) Ian Roberts has examined a shift of focus towards the situation of soldiers in Afghanistan itself in TV films such as Till Endemann’s *Auslandeinsatz* (2012), with its exploration of the moral dilemmas of soldiers caught between rules of engagement, superiors wary of public opinion at home and their own desire to make a difference as ‘citizens in uniform’, soldiers with a responsibility towards democratic values according to the Bundeswehr’s founding ideals.[[6]](#footnote-6) Literary scholar have started to take stock of textual responses, with Kai Köhler’s (2011) and Stefan Hermes’s (2014) surveys noting the same movement from German settings to Afghanistan. Pointing to Wolfgang Schorlau’s *Brennende Kälte* (2008), in which a soldier with an experimental weapon goes missing in Germany, Köhler notes how, in anology to TV Krimis (e.g.*Unter anderen Umständen*, ‘Auf Liebe und Tod’, ZDF, 2011), crime thrillers offer fictions in which incidents in Afghanistan play out in a disruption of the social fabric at home.[[7]](#footnote-7) Among other texts, Hermes contrasts Ingo Niermann and Alexander Wallasch’s homecoming novel *Deutscher Sohn* (2010), in which ‘Toni’ Heinemann’s experiences in Afghanistan, for all that they set the therapeutic narrative moving, are barely illuminated, with Kurbjuweit’s *Kriegsbraut*, which largely plays out in Afghanistan on which more below.[[8]](#footnote-8) Such stock-taking is necessary work, but quickly superseded by fresh developments. Hermes discusses Linus Reichlin’s short story ‘Weltgegend’ (2011), in which a soldier kills a civilian he takes for a combatant, but Hermes is unable to consider the novel for which this was a study. About a reporter who pursues the story of a ‘Bacha posh’ (a girl brought up as a boy) fighting incognito in the troop of a ruthless Taliban commander, Reichlin’s *Das Leuchten in der Ferne* (2013) offers a sympathetic portrayal of German soldiers in the military camps where Martens stays. And the appearance of Scheuer’s *Die Sprache der Vögel* in 2015 marks another step in the emergence of a self-consciously literary discourse about Afghanistan.

Kurbjuweit’s and Scheuer’s novels stand out among literary treatments for their extended focus on the experiences of soldiers in Afghanistan, while never losing sight of the significance of the deployment at home. This focus draws attention to an important issue of representation, namely who is entitled to represent soldiers’ experiences, from what perspective and how. As first-hand accounts, the proliferation of soldiers’ memoirs which shape the discursive field novelists must negotiate lay claim to a unique authority that for literary scholars and historians is grounded in the intensity of their experience, and is accessible only to those who have lived it. For Samuel Hynes, in *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (1997), the ‘close texture’ of soldiers’ experience cannot be rendered at second-hand.[[9]](#footnote-9) What for him gives soldiers’ accounts their truth is not just the plain style used to capture the horror of conflict (‘Battlefield Gothic’), it is also their depiction of a ‘profound inner change’ akin to conversion literature.[[10]](#footnote-10) In *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (2008), Noah Yuval Harari traces this authority back to philosophical developments of the Enlightenment and Romanticism that configured war as a visceral experience revealing hidden truths.[[11]](#footnote-11) Harari describes as ‘flesh-witnessing’ how extreme experiences produce moments of revelation: positive revelations of heroism, comradeship, patriotism or, typically after the twentieth century, negative ones of disillusion or trauma.[[12]](#footnote-12) In the Federal Republic, the history of soldiers’ accounts is rendered fraught by the role of the sanitised memoirs of former Wehrmacht officers in the construction in the 1950s of a ‘usable’ wartime past.[[13]](#footnote-13) However, beginning with Wohlgethan’s memoirs of his deployment to Afghanistan in 2002 in *Endstation Kabul* in 2008 and Groos’s account of being the first person on the scene of the attack on the bus full of soldiers returning home in 2003 in *Ein schöner Tag zum Sterben* in 2009, the ISAF deployment hasled to a resurgence of the military memoir. These texts, and others, are important for the literary treatments to appear subsequently because they offered a repository of images and experiences – from the moment of arrival to the challenges of homecoming – and because they defined, from the vantage of soldiers on the ground, the perception of a slippage into a war no one wanted to recognise.

For Hermes, what matters is not the authenticity of literary representations of the deployment but their thematic focus.[[14]](#footnote-14) However, the authority with which soldiers’ experiences are represented appears as a recurrent issue in both the production and reception of texts. Texts acknowledge soldiers’ accounts and memoirs as sources. *Die Sprache der Vögel*, for example, includes a ‘Danksagung’ acknowledging the stories of an ex-soldier whom Scheuer met in a supermarket café and a bibliography listing texts by Wohlgethan andGroos among others. For reviewers too the source of the representations was an important consideration. For Julia Encke in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Kurbjuweit’s trips to Afghanistan for *Der Spiegel* underwrote his representation of the deployment, while interviews ‘unter dem Siegel der Verschwiegenheit’ with two women soldiers gave depth to the figure of Esther.[[15]](#footnote-15) Likewise for *Die Sprache der Vögel*,Irish Radisch observed in *Die Zeit* how Scheuer’s use of first-hand accounts made for sober ‘Nahaufnahmen in der Etappe’.[[16]](#footnote-16) While this article does not discuss *Das Leuchten in der Ferne*, it is striking to note Linus Reichlin’s response to Ralph Gerstenberg’s questions about the experience and research informing his novel on a 2015 radio programme about literary depictions of flashpoints across the globe. He had not visited Afghanistan but had consulted sources including soldiers’ accounts, Reichlin explained, before adding that he had also used ‘Einfühlung’ as the ‘Hauptaufgabe des Schriftstellers.’[[17]](#footnote-17)

One can see in this preoccupation with the sources an acknowledgement of the authority of soldiers’ accounts of their experience. However, as Reichlin reminds us, a salient question for literary criticism is also how the fictional narratives of literary texts adapt or position themselves in relation to these and the authority they claim. A useful approaching is offered by Christa Karpenstein-Eßbach, whose *Orte der Grausamkeit: Die Neuen Kriege in der Literatur* (2012) considers (among others) how, in a relation that she describes as a form of ‘Medienkonkurrenz’, recent novels about war journalists including Nicolas Born’s *Die Fälschung* (1979) and Norbert Gstrein’s *Das Handwerk des Tötens* (2003) position themselves towards war reporting as a discourse rooted in the immediacy of observation.[[18]](#footnote-18) For Karpenstein-Eßbach, Georg Laschen founders in Born’s *Die Fälschung* in his coverage of the Lebanese civil war between his aspiration towards pure observation, the emotional participation demanded by the media market, and the recognition that his texts need no authenticity for their impact.[[19]](#footnote-19) But Born’s novel, she argues, grants its fictional discourse ‘eine hervorgehobene Stellung’ from which it speaks about Laschen and his reporting.[[20]](#footnote-20) By contrast, Gstrein’s *Das Handwerk des Tötens* offers a ‘Schichtung erzählerischer Perspektiven’ in which every perspective relativizes another in the narratives of the reporter Christian Allmayer, a writer who is researching Allmayer’s story, and a first-person narrator.[[21]](#footnote-21) The novel still reflects on Allmayer’s reporting, but without an overarching perspective from which it speaks a supraordinated truth about this.[[22]](#footnote-22) Where reviewers tend to assume more or less explicitly that Kurbjuweit’s and Scheuer’s novels legitimise their representations of the Afghanistan deployment by drawing on the authority of soldiers’ accounts and memoirs, Karpenstein-Eßbach’s approach to the literary representation of war reporters helps us to frame the question of representation in more interesting terms as a question about the relation between the fictional discourse of the novel and the experience-based forms of soldiers’ accounts, and the way the former positions itself towards and speaks about the latter and its claims. Karpenstein-Eßbach’s discussion of Born and Gstrein also offers practical impulses towards reading Kurbjuweit’s and Scheuer’s novels, which affirm the power of literary invention to shed fresh light on soldiers’ experience while situating themselves in relation to soldiers’ accounts of their experiences in different ways. *Kriegsbraut* shows the influence of Kurbjuweit’s journalism and its narrative reproduces motifs familiar from soldiers’ accounts, also those of women soldiers. It offers, analogously to Born’s novel, a critical position from which these are subverted and the nature of Esther’s experience as gendered and her understanding of cultural difference as bounded by gender is explored. Like Gstrein’s novel, *Die Sprache der Vögel* offers a more complex, ambivalent and self-consciously literary interplay of perspectives which perhaps demands fuller analysis. Paul’s birdwatching opens new perspectives within the familiar outline of his military diary to reveal more fictional and utopian elements and to connect with a literary tradition of the use of birds and bird song to comment on the unspeakability of war. Avian motifs also bind Paul’s diary into the novel’s wider narratives, with his former teacher’s reading of it offering an unstable position from which its utopian potential is upheld.

*Kriegsbraut*, to turn to Kurbjweit’s novel in more detail, was greeted in 2011 as a notable response to the Bundeswehr’s deployment. Its resonance was such that it was adapted by Andrea Oetzmann for radio in 2011 and by Nicole Oders for the stage in 2012.[[23]](#footnote-23) Reviewers praised its depiction of the Bundeswehr’s work in Afghanistan, and for Gustav Seibt, in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, its focus on a woman soldier was ‘literarisch wirkliches Neuland’.[[24]](#footnote-24) The novel’s romantic plots did, however, come in for some criticism. For one reviewer, Esther’s affair with the solipsistic film maker Thilo (a motivating factor for her to join the Bundeswehr and train as a signals specialist) was cheesy, ‘fast 20.15-ZDF-tauglich’.[[25]](#footnote-25) For another, her romance with Mehsud, the headmaster of the school for girls for which Esther becomes the liaison officer, appeared as if ‘am Reissbrett entwickelt’.[[26]](#footnote-26)

For Julia Encke in the *Frankfurter* *Allgemeine* *Sonntagszeitung* *Kriegsbraut* was less a ‘Kriegsroman’ than an ‘analytischer Reportageroman’.[[27]](#footnote-27) This comment is symptomatic of how the reception valorised qualities of observation that critics related to Kurbjuweit’s profession as a journalist, while downplaying the handling of plot and relationships. It also reflects the weight commentators placed on Kurbjuweit’s own journalistic (rather than military) experience of Afghanistan, and while it underplays the literary interest of *Kriegsbraut*, one must acknowledge the relation to Kurbjuweit’s journalism. Like his *Schussangst* (1998), which dealt with the Germany’s response to the Balkans conflict in the 1990s, *Kriegsbraut* develops, in exploratory and open-ended fashion, themes from his reports and editorials, which were in turn shaped by fact-finding trips to Afghanistan.

Kurbjuweit related to Ralph Gerstenberg on the radio in 2015 the inspiration behind Esther Dischereit in a trip to Kundus to write an article about opium farming. He had been struck, he explained, by a female soldier in a convoy: ‘Ganz blond, immer damit beschäftigt, ihre Lippen rot nachzuziehen […] und gleichzeitig auch das G36, also das Gewehr der Bundeswehr.’[[28]](#footnote-28) During a stop, villagers crowded around her: ‘Das war für mich fremd, aber für die Afghanen war es noch viel fremder.’[[29]](#footnote-29) This incident is fictionalised in *Kriegsbraut* when Esther’s convoy stops in a settlement and she feels on her the ‘starrende Augen’ of the inhabitants and a man’s hand ‘als liefe eine große Spinne durch ihr Haar’.[[30]](#footnote-30)The article, in *Der Spiegel* in 2005, highlighted the German government’s reluctance, in contrast to the US approach, to take military action against opium farmers for fear of alienating the local population.[[31]](#footnote-31) It is one of many pieces to consider how for Kurbjuweit the German government misunderstood Afghanistan and the extent to which its culture was open to democratic change and how the deployment in turn impacted on the FRG. Connections are easily drawn from Kurbjuweit’s journalism to situations in *Kriegsbraut*. Especially the helicopter strike called by Esther when she is ambushed near a farm reflects the loss of innocence of German soldiers as ‘citizens in uniform’ that for Kurbjuweit followed from the strike, called on the basis of incorrect information, on the hijacked tankers on 4 September 2009.[[32]](#footnote-32) Esther calls in air support when two soldiers are killed, and her injured superior Tauber later credits her with saving him.[[33]](#footnote-33) However, she tells the US pilot that she has not seen civilians at the buildings. This is true for this day, but she omits having seen a woman previously – an omission that torments her when news of the dead woman and children emerges.[[34]](#footnote-34) The incident marks Esther’s own loss of innocence, and seemingly confirms Mehsud’s dictum, based on his responsibility for the disappearance of his wife and daughter as his family fled the Taliban: ‘Man ist schuldig, sobald man afghanischen Boden betritt.’[[35]](#footnote-35)

From a literary perspective, a central problem is the representation of Esther’s experience as a woman soldier and the role of fiction here.Speaking to Gerstenberg, Kurbjuweit ostensibly acknowledged that the visceral nature of combat experience could truly be understood only by soldiers. He explained: ‘Man kann Krieg nicht wirklich erzählen. Man kann seinen Verwandten nicht klarmachen, was man erlebt hat [….], wie das ist, unter Beschuss oder gar verwundet irgendwo zu liegen.’[[36]](#footnote-36) *Kriegsbraut* dramatises this in homecoming scenes (among others) in which Esther reflects on the incomprehension greeting her back in Germany. After telling a bemused shop assistant that she is a soldier, for example, she finds herself trying on a burqa-blue dress in a moment crystallising her experiences, her preoccupation with the dead woman and all she cannot explain.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Up to a point *Kriegsbraut* qualifies its representation of Esther’s experience by acknowledging the difficulty of narrating it. However, as Kurbjuweit explained, he also ascribed to the novel form its own inventive power to generate scenarios exceeding the lived experience of soldiers and others. As he observed: ‘Der Roman kommt natürlich weit über die erlebbare Realität hinaus, was nicht heißt, das es diese Realität nicht gibt […]. Das ist der Vorteil des Romans, auch dass er Geschichten erzählen kann, die möglich wären, aber wir wissen nicht, ob es sie noch gab’.[[38]](#footnote-38) This power too is inscribed in scenes involving the imagining of alternative lives and futures. At a party, Esther, Thilo and his wife sketch scenarios for a film about the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan in 2022. Thilo’s conjectures echo Kurbjuweit’s views: ‘Wir denken jetzt noch, dass wir aus Afghanistan eine kleine Bundesrepublik machen, mit schönen Wahlen und Menschenrechten und Frauenquote und alldem, aber in Wahrheit, das zeigt der Film, kommt Afghanistan zu uns.’[[39]](#footnote-39) Some scenarios, with the Bundeswehr retrenched in its camps, anticipate later developments; others, with a Colonel becoming Bundeskanzler, are more fanciful. The imagining of other lives is particularly associated with the women soldiers and applied to Afghan women. When Maxi, Esther’s roommate, returns from the market with a burqa, Maxi, Ina, her other roommate, and Esther try it on to see the world through its grille.[[40]](#footnote-40) Later Maxi acquires a mannequin which they dress in it. They name the figure ‘Fatima’ and imagine her life: running the household after her mother dies, her brother detained by US forces, her father’s opium fields protected by the Bundeswehr, an arranged marriage.[[41]](#footnote-41) The representation of soldiers’ experience may offer a problem, but the experience of Afghan women – the improvement of which is central to Esther’s liaison role with the school – remains altogether a blank in the novel, being available only indirectly via the imaginings of Esther, Maxi and Ina.

The main focus of the novel’s own imaginative reconstruction is Esther’s experience as a woman soldier and her affair with Mehsud. What the women soldiers whom Kurbjuweit interviewed told him is unknown, but the account of Esther’s enlistment, training and deployment is consistent with published accounts like Heike Groos’s memoir, pieces in Jasna Zajček’s *Soldatinnen: Ein Frontbericht* (2010), and passages devoted to Antje Käßner’s military service in her and her husband Tino Käßner’s *Wofür wir kämpfen: Wie der Krieg in Afghanistan unser Leben veränderte* (2011),which focuses on Tino’s injury in an attack in Kabul. However, the adoption of a third-person narrative that uses free indirect discourse to construct Esther as its focaliser opens up a space between narrative perspective and her voice from which *Kriegsbraut* speaks critically about limitations of Esther’s experience and mobilises further its inventive power in relating her affair with Mehsud.

*Kriegsbraut* reproduces tropes from German soldiers’ memoirs. Esther’s arrival, with the wall of heat and dust when the rear of the transporter plane opens, for example, rehearses a familiar scene.[[42]](#footnote-42) Also familiar is her gaze upon the mountain and desert landscape, barren and awesome, which embodies the ‘sublime’ quality Harari ascribes to sites of battlefield revelation.[[43]](#footnote-43) Sometimes the approach is playful, even subversive. With Esther as focaliser, *Kriegsbraut* reproduces the exoticising gaze of soldiers’ texts, but her ‘aufgeregtes Fremdsein’ as her convoy drives through Kundus is undercut by Tauber’s monologue about his ‘Jahreskarte für Werder Bremen’.[[44]](#footnote-44) The novel’s *in medias res* opening, which has a man charging headlong at Esther’s convoy, also replicates a common device.[[45]](#footnote-45) The effect is bathos when it emerges that he is not the usual threat but is rushing for the gifts distributed by German soldiers to win hearts and minds at a time before the situation turns hostile.

*Kriegsbraut* also reproduces elements more specific to accounts by women soldiers. As for Antje Käßner, self-realisation beyond traditional gender roles is a motivation behind Esther’s enlistment. With Esther frustrated by her bar job and by Thilo, a poster of a female soldier promises ‘ein eigenes Leben’.[[46]](#footnote-46) In the army, however, Esther is confronted with the persistence of traditional roles and her own assumptions about these. Like Groos’s memoir, *Kriegsbraut* highlights everyday sexism as male trainers target female recruits for affairs and subject them to sexual insults – shouting at the recruits as they move along the ground “Ihr sollt die Erde ficken!” and singling out Esther with ‘“Du kannst das ja nicht”’.[[47]](#footnote-47) Her basic training presents no challenges, ‘weder die Ordnung noch die Disziplin und schon gar nicht die körperliche Anstrengung.’[[48]](#footnote-48) But like Groos, Estheris forced into measuring her performance according to the norms of male trainers. Irony comes into play in the gap between the third-person narrative and Esther’s perspective when *Kriegsbraut* registers the concessions that she grants herself here: ‘das war der Maßstab für sie und die anderen Soldatinnen: Wie steht unser Können zum Können der Männer? Gleichstand war das Ziel, doch sie gab sich selbst einen kleinen Rabatt, sodass, “fast so gut wie die Jungs” eigentlich hieß: “so gut wie die Jungs”.’[[49]](#footnote-49) Nowhere is the critical stance that *Kriegsbraut* adopts towards aspects of published accounts clearer than when Esther is confronted with blind spots in her own attitudes to the ‘Gleichstand’ she values. In hermemoir,Groos confronts visiting Bundestag delegates with her identity as a woman soldier and mother when she challenges them for sending her, a mother of five, to Afghanistan twice in a year.[[50]](#footnote-50) In a scenereading like a critical reversal of this, Ina in turn challenges Esther when she asks Ina how hard it is not to see her child for six months: ‘“Hast du das die Männer hier auch gefragt?”’[[51]](#footnote-51)

*Kriegsbraut* unfolds further its potential to speak about Esther’s experience and its blind spots in the affair with Mehsud. For Kurbjuweit, having a female soldier initiate a liaison was a fictional development which conspicuously reversed established expectations, as again he stated to Gerstenberg: ‘Wir sind daran gewöhnt, dass Männer in besetzten Ländern Affären haben […]. Also wenn unsere Frauen – was früher natürlich ein Tabu war – Kriegerinnen werden können, also Kampfsoldatinnen, dann ist es natürlich auch denkbar, dass sie sexuelle Beziehungen zu Männern in besetzten Ländern eingehen. Ob es das schon gegeben hat, weiß ich nicht, aber ich halte es für möglich und fand es interessant, das mal durchzuspielen.’[[52]](#footnote-52) The construction of the third-person narrative exposes how inaccessible Mehsud, whom she exoticises from the start with his ‘Gesicht mit stolzen Zügen’, remains outside her projections of his otherness.[[53]](#footnote-53) Esther understands that for her the encounter with him is ‘einmalig’ because to her ‘Mehsud war Afghanistan’, but the novel leaves open what precisely she represents to him.[[54]](#footnote-54) Hermes observes that Esther’s affair with Mehsud, with its reversal of gender roles and feminisation of Mehsud, shows ‘wie eng Literarisierung geschlechtlicher und kultureller Differenzkonstruktionen oftmals miteinander verbunden sind’.[[55]](#footnote-55) This is true, but what it also shows is how Esther, who takes off her weapon and body armour to become more feminine when she finally kisses him, tends rather to dissolve his elusive cultural difference into a for her more familiar gendered one. This is clear in Esther’s response to Mehsud’s revelation at the close that he had remarried after his wife and daughter disappeared, a revelation that links her affair with Mehsud to her affair with Thilo earlier. Mehsud explains that the story about his (first) wife and daughter ‘ist eine wahre Geschichte. […] Diese Geschichte war da zu Ende. Dann begann eine neue’.[[56]](#footnote-56) If Esther sees in Mehsud’s behaviour an Afghan variant of a male expectation of staying married while having an affair on the side that she recognises from Thilo, from her standpoint this is comprehensible. But the novel never tells us the story Mehsud alludes to, and so Esther’s reading of their affair in terms of her relationship with Thilo is one-sided, a figure for a mismatch between German perceptions of and Afghan realities that are never fully understood.

*Die Sprache der Vögel* toowas received as a notable representation of the deployment. Referring to the use of soldiers’ memoirs to impart realism to the entries of Paul Arimond’s diary from 14 April 2003 to 23 May 2004,Martin Oehlen in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* praised its depiction of the ‘Alltag der Bundeswehr-Soldaten in Afghanistan […]: Die Langeweile, die Unbequemlichkeiten, die Gefahren, die Verletzungen, der gewaltsame Tod.’[[57]](#footnote-57) However, reviewers conceded that the text was more than ‘eine Kriegsreportage über den freiwilligen Einsatz am Hindukusch’ as they noted its literary qualities – its poetic description of birds, the deft way Paul’s diary combined with narratives about his father’s suicide and his ancestor Ambrosius’s journey to the Hindukush in 1776 – and the sketches made using a wash of coffee by Scheuer’s son Erasmus.[[58]](#footnote-58) The contrast with perceptions of *Kriegsbraut* as an ‘analytischer Reportageroman’ is striking. If it reflects the indeed greater literary artifice of Scheuer’s text, it also acknowledges his reputation as an exponent, alongside Andreas Meier or Katharina Hacker, of a new ‘Heimatliteratur’ emerging after the 1990s as a counterweight to the prominence of Berlin in literary discourse.[[59]](#footnote-59) Notwithstanding the focus on Afghanistan, its figures and stories also rooted thenovel in the town of Kall in the Eifel region, since *Der Steinesammler* (1999) the site for Scheuer of a series of interlinked fictions modelled after Sherwood Anderson’s story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).

Reviewers recognised the work undertaken to represent Paul’s military experiences, but if they appreciated the use of birds, bird song and flight as poetic motifs, none commented on Scheuer’s research into the text’s ornithological content. Just as Scheuer acknowledges the ex-soldier in the supermarket and soldiers’ memoirs, so he lists his sources here. An inspiration, his ‘Danksagung’ noted, were birding notes by Frank Joisten, a soldier who served in Kabul, Masar-i-Sharif, Kundus and Feisabad.[[60]](#footnote-60) The bibliography lists *Afghanistan zoologisch betrachtet* (2012) by Günther Nogge, a former director of Kabul’s zoo who appears in the novel to lecture soldiers on Afghan wildlife.[[61]](#footnote-61) Also cited are historical and popular texts. Historical texts, including, from the late eighteenth century, writings by Georges-Louis Leclerc and Comte de Buffon, reproduced in a reprint of the engravings by François-Nicolas Martinet which accompanied them, inform passages devoted to Ambrosius.[[62]](#footnote-62) They shape his pre-evolutionary conception of bird life as ‘herrlichste[…] Creature[…]’ and the pinnacle of God’s creation, a conception colouring Paul’s views too.[[63]](#footnote-63) David Rothenberg’s *Why Birds Sing: A Journey into the Mystery of Bird Song* (2005) feeds Paul’s conviction that the beauty of bird song cannot be explained, as per post-Darwinian orthodoxy, by sexual and territorial display alone.[[64]](#footnote-64) While Joisten’s notes were not published, a published bird-watching diary by a soldier cited is Jonathan Trouern-Trend’s *Birding Babylon: A Soldier’s Journal from Iraq* (2006). Originating in a spell in Iraq with the Connecticut National Guard, Trouern-Trend’s illustrated diary has been read as both an environmentalist text advocating the preservation of nature in conflict zones and the document of a military environmentalism that promotes natural sustainability to further military ends.[[65]](#footnote-65)

In Scheuer’s novel the military deployment and the realm of birds intersect to different effect. Paul’s ornithological observations and the associated avian motifs relate to the potential of literary invention to effect a poetic transformation of a diary of his military experience ostensiblymodelled after soldiers’ accounts. Scheuer’s ‘Danksagung’ acknowledges the authority of soldiers’ experiences when he thanks the ex-soldier in the supermarket for his story and defers to the ‘Wirklichkeit, die diese [Erzählung] beeinflusst und in ihr wirkt.’[[66]](#footnote-66) However, the novel’s epigram, from Richard Wilbur’s poem ‘Lying’ (1983), validates the power of literary invention to assert its own truths, connecting this to the text’s avian motifs. The epigram – ‘It is tributary to the great lies told with the eyes half-shut that have the truth in view’ – is a citation from a poem that avers that ‘To claim, at a dead party, to have spotted a grackle/When in fact you haven’t of late, can do no harm’.[[67]](#footnote-67) Wilbur’s poetic voice invokes ‘the shrug of unreal wings’ that one may hear having made such a claim and it asserts that ‘All these things/Are there before us; there before we look/Or fail to look; there to be seen or not/By us, as by the bee’s twelve thousand eyes,/According to our means and purposes.’[[68]](#footnote-68) As reviewers noted, Paul’s diary draws on soldiers’ accounts to offer a seemingly sober narrative about the deployment, but this is tied to ornithological observations that validate literary invention and poetic truth and assume their own fictional productivity when Paul escapes his camp to watch birds.

Already Paul’s account of his arrival crystallises the transformation of his military experience. Here too the arrival scene, dated 14 April 2003, comprises familiar elements. Paul describes the heat, the monochrome scenery and the fine dust as he boards the bus taking him from the airfield through town to his camp.[[69]](#footnote-69) But the scene is framed by his observation of magpies on the runway, which alters its elements. The runway becomes a site of natural conflict as the birds fight over a ‘Küken, das sie wahrscheinlich aus einem Nest geraubt haben’, the dust is like ‘fein zerriebene[…] Eierschalen’ and the town becomes a nesting site as Paul wonders ‘wo die Elstern hier ihre Nester bauen’.[[70]](#footnote-70) Its plumage distinguishes the observed Asian magpie from the European variety, but there is a link to Germany when Paul remembers the magpies at his base: ‘sie hockten krächzend in der Krone einer Zitterpappel, während wir uns im Schulungsraum auf unseren Afghanistaneinsatz vorbereiteten’.[[71]](#footnote-71) The bird is later connected to Paul’s childhood memories of Kall when he recalls a chick that had fallen from its nest.[[72]](#footnote-72) A comment about the subspecies of magpie in Afghanistan also makes a link to Ambriosius’s observation of the variations between them ‘im Ornament ihres Gefieders, in Schwanz- und Schnabelfarbe und in der Größe’.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Regarding his military experiences, Paul’s diary offers a realism consistent with the memoirs cited as sources. Perhaps with parallels to the image of Kall in Scheuer’s work, it gives a strong sense of the topography of his camp, a settlement with ‘Schlaf- und Verwaltungscontainern, einer Pizzeria, einem Einkaufszentrum und einer Poststelle’ and bounded by an inner fence, a no-man’s-land (‘Sperrgebiet’) and an outer wall.[[74]](#footnote-74) Paul captures the monotony when, initially, the mood is calm, with time to kill in the sleeping container he shares with Sergei and Julian. He describes his work as a paramedic, from stand-by duty in the camp to providing medical cover on missions outside. Paul offers few remarks on the aim of the deployment. When he is disciplined by the camp commander for trying to leave the camp to observe birds, his rote response to the commander’s question about this aim reveals a lack of engagement. It is ‘genau das, was man uns erzählt hat’: ‘Wir verteidigen die Freiheit dieses Landes und die Freiheit der westlichen Welt’.[[75]](#footnote-75)

With this novel too set at a moment when conditions turn hostile, Paul’s diary records the rocket attacks on the camp and the attacks on soldiers outside it. Nassim, a civilian who works in the camp, speaks openly of the ‘war’ Paul’s superiors avoid mentioning.[[76]](#footnote-76) The trope of the ‘battlefield gothic’ (Hynes) comes into view. For example, on 26 August 2003 Paul describes in matter-of-fact fashion the aftermath of an incident in which the driver of a German vehicle is torn open by a mine: ‘wir klettern in den [Sanitätswagen…]. Mechanisch schlage ich das über den Toten gebreitete Tuch zurück und knöpfe seine Uniform auf, damit der Arzt die Untersuchung durchführen kann. Plötzlich halte ich warme Gedärme in der Hand. Ich drücke sie zurück in den Bauchraum […]. Nachdem wir unsere Arbeit erledigt haben, wird der Soldat in die Kühlkammer gebracht.’[[77]](#footnote-77) Read as a soldier’s account, Paul’s diary offers a narrative of, in Harari’s terms, negative revelation. Paul was motivated to enlist by his guilt over a car accident in which his friend Jan suffered brain-damage, but his experiences lead to disillusion, not redemption. Disillusion is also apparent in the fates of other soldiers: Julian, an ambitious soldier who returns troubled from a mission, or the drone pilot Levier, who engages in virtual flight at his console and breaks down after a strike kills suspected insurgents.[[78]](#footnote-78)

As with his arrival, Paul’s ornithological observations transform his military experiences to produce a narrative with a utopian potential that is overtly fictional and self-consciously literary. Paul’s Zeiss binoculars are not just a military device for surveying the terrain for hostile activity, but also an ornithological tool that reconfigures it. Paul’s observations follow a pattern as he describes the birds’ appearance, their behaviour and their song. In the case of the dead sea sparrows by the paramedics’ tent, for example, he notes the ‘Durcheinander quietschender und quäkender Laute, ein Geplapper, dann kleine pfeifende kristalline Töne’ and speculates that for them ‘Sprache und Melodie’ are identical.[[79]](#footnote-79) Finally, the birds’ likeness is captured impressionistically in his sketches, which preserve ‘die Erinnerung an das Gesehene’ in a way that photographs cannot.[[80]](#footnote-80) Consistently, Paul notes the birds’ disregard for the boundaries of the camp as the dead sea sparrows and red-fronted serins freely cross the no-man’s-land between its outer and inner barriers.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The novel takes a pointedly imaginative turn when, having observed birds in the no-man’s-land, Paul works out how he can cross it to reach the lake visible from the watchtower. With its appearance changing ‘mit Veränderungen in der Atmosphäre […], dem Wechselspiel von Wolken, Licht und Reflexionen’, the lake is a site with shifting meanings.[[82]](#footnote-82) It is crucial to bird life in a landlocked region, and it offers a stopping point for migratory birds that, like the magpies, link Afghanistan and Germany. Paul’s meetings with Nassim there bring its significance for Nassim and the region’s history into view. This was where Nassim and his father, later killed by the Taliban, would catch birds to sell in Kabul; and a lakeside hut destroyed during the Soviet occupation is where Nassim goes to remember his father.[[83]](#footnote-83) The lake offers a point of identification with Ambrosius when Paul imagines him there.[[84]](#footnote-84) When Paul reaches it, he experiences a sense of plenitude contrasting with the disillusionment in his account of the military deployment. His entry of 11 August 2003 describes not battlefield revelation, but a utopian glimpse of unity and connectedness: ‘Ich sitze an der Mauer, Rauchschwalben segeln dicht über dem Wasser. Ich höre glitzernde Töne, die sich mit Stimmen und Geräuschen mischen. Ich glaube, alles besteht aus einer Melodie, die man nur in bestimmten Momenten zu hören vermag.’[[85]](#footnote-85) After many visits, Paul triggers the alarm in the no-man’s-land, and he is forbidden from entering it. However, in his last entry, 23 May 2004, he records one more visit. We learn from his former teacher Helena that he was then found wandering through Afghanistan by US soldiers. The reality of Afghanistan comes back into play with the news, in the form of a press release, of the attack on his bus.[[86]](#footnote-86)

The ambivalence of *Die Sprache der Vögel* as a literary text is due to the way its avian motifs are overdetermined in Paul’s diary and in its relation to other narrative threads. Animal-centred criticism, which explores how texts construct the relation between the human and animal at different historical moments, can illuminate how the novel mobilises its motifs to such effect. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of the formation of knowledge into a given historical ‘episteme’ (*The Order of Things*, 1966) and Agamben’s account of Western thought as an ‘anthropological machine’ that produces the difference between humans and animals (*The Open*, 2002), Julia Bodenburg has shown how animals serve in texts as poetic figures that speak to a ‘historisch spezifisches Anordnungsverhältnis von Mensch und Tier’ that she terms a ‘Disposition von Humanem und Animalischem’.[[87]](#footnote-87) Certainly, Paul’s utopian experience by the lake is underwritten by a specific historical view of the relation between birds, human beings and human language. It stems from his identification with Ambrosius’s pre-Darwinian view of birds as a pinnacle of creation, and their song, in contrast to the noise of dumber beasts, as a key to its mysteries and an influence on human language. For Bodenburg, literary texts generally reproduce a binary opposition of human/animal that like other binaries (male/female, culture/nature) underpins Western thought. However, drawing on John Berger’s essay ‘Why look at animals?’ (1977), she also claims that the inscrutable stare with which animals return the human gaze offers a point from which assumptions about the relation between humans, the animal, and the inhuman can be destabilised.[[88]](#footnote-88) This logic too is at work when Scheuer’s novel invokes a literary tradition in which birds are witness to, and their song a comment on, the unspeakable horror of war and the inhumanity of which human beings are capable. Discussing Trouern-Trend’s *Birding Babylon*, Molly Wallace points to the bird’s call in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) as a figure for the unspeakability of the fire-bombing of Dresden.[[89]](#footnote-89) Vonnegut’s bird offers a perspective highlighting the ‘senselessness of war by envisioning it from the outside’ and it ‘speaks of the unspeakable, saying “all there is to say”, which is saying essentially nothing’.[[90]](#footnote-90) In English, recent use of birds and their song in this way has focused on World War I, in Sebastian Faulks’s *Birdsong* (1993) or David Malouf’s *Fly away Peter* (1982), which Scheuer lists in his bibliography. The bird as commentator on the horror of war also has a tradition in German treatments of World War I, e.g. Robert Musil’s story ‘Die Amsel’ (1936). The motif is now associated with World War II and the atrocities of National Socialism. Examples include Arno Surminski’s *Die Vogelwelt von Auschwitz* (2008), in which a prisoner assists an SS officer and ornithologist in cataloguing birds around the camp. Or in Marcel Beyer’s *Kaltenburg* (2008), as Alan Bance observes, the animals that witness the bombing of Dresden and the birds in the research institute ofLudwigKaltenburg during the GDR inhabit a parallel universe that overlaps spatially with the human world, but affords an alternative perspective on it.[[91]](#footnote-91) In an interview in *Die Welt* in 2015, Scheuer acknowledged his use of bird song as a ‘Metapher für das Nichtbegreifen’.[[92]](#footnote-92) Applied to the Bundeswehr deployment in ISAF, the use of birds and their song to capture such incomprehensibility seems overstated. Yetitreflects thecontroversy around a deployment perceived as progessively more hostile and the force with which the language of war reestablished itself in public discourse in relation to it.

The ambivalence of the novel’s avian motifs is heightened when one considers the relationship between Paul’s diary and the other strands. Not unlike the way that for Karpenstein-Eßbach the narrative perspectives of Gstrein’s *Das Handwerk des Tötens* relativise one another and refuse a stable position from which to comment on the experience of the novel’s war reporter protagonist, so the strands of Scheuer’s novel add complexity and uphold the possibility of alternative readings of Paul’s diary.[[93]](#footnote-93)Paul’s plan to turn his collection of feathers into a scrap book provides the basis for the metaphor of the text as a ‘Gefieder aus Worten’.[[94]](#footnote-94) There are parallels here to the way that the collection and enumeration of objects of the natural world – stones in *Der Steinesammler*, fish in *Überm Rauschen* (2009)– become material signifiers of processes of individual and cultural memory and of narration in Scheuer’s work.[[95]](#footnote-95) The metaphor of a ‘Gefieder aus Worten’ captures here the way the novel’s narratives are connected by avian motifs. We have noted how Ambrosius’s story offers a historical view of birds and their song that colours Paul’s understanding. The stories of Jan’s accident and the suicide of Paul’s father have an important psychological function, illuminating how his past shapes his experience in Afghanistan. Paul relates the first in his diary and the second in free-standing passages in narratives culminating alongside important events in Afghanistan. The revelation that Paul was driving when Jan sustained brain-damage follows the blast after which Paul pushes the dead man’s intestines into his body and comes just before he is caught in no-man’s-land.[[96]](#footnote-96) Jan’s chatter – ‘Laute, die niemand verstehen kann’ – offers a senseless counterpart to bird song.[[97]](#footnote-97) Paul’s father, a former high jump champion, dies leaping from a motorway bridge under which falcons nest. For him, jumping is flight: ‘Vater sprach, wenn er vom Hochspringen erzählte, immer nur vom Fliegen, irgendwann erreiche man während des Flugs einen Punkt, von dem an der Fall beginne’.[[98]](#footnote-98) While the motif of flying is associated foremost with birds in the novel it reoccurs elsewhere, often, as here, coupled with falling. The account of his father’s suicide ends with his take-off (‘[er] kam in Rückenlage, sah in den Himmel und hob ab’) in a passage following the news of the attack on Paul’s bus and it endows Paul’s fate with connotations of flight and falling.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Narrated from a later time by an unnamed third-person narrator, passages devoted to Helena, Paul’s former teacher, offer a framework for rereading Paul’s diary. Helena receives its loose pages from Julian when they meet at the hospital in Kall, Helena receiving cancer treatment, Julian visiting Paul after the attack. For Katharina Granzin, in *die tageszeitung*, this frame narrative clarified nothing.[[100]](#footnote-100) Certainly, Helena’s memories of Paul as ‘ein verschlossener, schlacksiger Junge’ obsessed by birds render the ‘Gefieder’ of the text more dense, but without explaining more about him. However, it constructs the position for an unstable but open reading of the diary in which its meanings are recreated for Helena and for the novel’s readers. One stormy evening, when Julian hands over Paul’s papers they fly through the air, and Helena lays them to dry, ‘ein Blatt neben das andere, als würde sie ein Mosaik aus Worten zusammenfügen’.[[101]](#footnote-101) Paul’s soaked entries are hard to decipher, but in sorting them, Helena actively reconstructs his experiences as she reviews his account of the deployment and engages with his notes. The diary offers a richer picture of the deployment than ever she gleaned from media reports, for example in his account of an ambush following a visit with army engineers to a school for girls that has been attacked.[[102]](#footnote-102) Reading Paul’s notes, she is astonished ‘wie viele derart schöne Vögel es in Afghanistan gab’.[[103]](#footnote-103) Sorting Paul’s diary forms part of Helena’s recovery from illness. In contrast to the disillusionment of much of Paul’s diary, it is a process that upholds its utopian potential, offering Helena too a glimpse of ‘unentdeckte Beziehungen zwischen den Dingen und den Vorstellungen’.[[104]](#footnote-104) This is the novel’s invitation to the reader: to read *Die Sprache der Vögel* as a fluid whole in which meanings are not fixed and in which Paul’s disillusionment with his deployment and his eventual fate can be balanced against more utopian elements too.

Dirk Kurbjuweit’s *Kriegsbraut* (2011) and Norbert Scheuer’s *Die Sprache der Vögel* (2015) are compelling literary treatments of the experiences of German soldiers in Afghanistan. The deployment of the Bundeswehr in ISAF has been unpopular in the Federal Republic and, from the 2000s, films, TV movies and the memoirs of soldiers have played a central role in shaping public perceptions of its slippage into war. Literary treatments have appeared more slowly, but what makes Kurbjuweit’s and Scheuer’s novels so striking is their engagement with the question of what literary discourse brings to the representation of soldiers’ experiences. Soldiers’ memoirs lay claim to pre-eminence in the representation of these experiences and, like other literary accounts, *Kriegsbraut* and *Die Sprache der Vögel* draw on tropes associated with these memoirs to assert the authenticity of their representations. The novels do not, however, defer to the authority of soldiers’ accounts so much as mobilise their own power of literary invention. While *Kriegsbraut* holds elements of soldiers’ accounts up to critical scrutiny and uses them to explore fictional scenarios, the avian motifs and unstable narrative perspectives of *Die Sprache der Vögel* point to the horror of war and uphold the utopian potential of Paul’s military and birdwatching diary. With the end of ISAF in 2014, only a few German soldiers have remained in Afghanistan, but their ongoing presence there continues to loom large in news headlines and in debates at home. One senses that the literary exploration of the deployment has only just begun and that the topic remains ripe for further treatment. The ISAF deployment has been the most significant of the Bundeswehr’s deployments outside Germany, and it has marked an important caesura in the foreign and security policy of the Federal Republic since the end of the Cold War. For their part, Kurbjuweit’s *Kriegsbraut* and Scheuer’s *Die Sprache der Vögel* have, in their treatment of it, given fresh impetus to the literary representation of German soldiers and their experiences too.

1. <https://www.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/bwde/start/einsaetze/ueberblick/zahlen/!ut/p/z1/hY4xD4IwFIR_iwNrXwMR0a0qi8HEBInQxRSoBa2UlAL-fGvYjMTb3r3vLgcUUqANG2rBTK0aJu2dUf-6DaJz5K5ddx_HO0yS0E_CmHjY9-HyD6D2jWdEMMQlh8x2rGY7jhYCCvTOBvZCrdJGcoNY8VkIWcWaUvKTKshkHIAKqfJpOmlyLxBANb9xzTXqtbUrY9pu42AHj-OIhFJCclQo1D8c_CtUqc5A-s1C-0xH7C3lEJHFGzwJlLY!/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/#Z7_B8LTL2922DSSC0AUE6UESA30M0> (viewed 1 November 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/bwde/start/gedenken/todesfaelle_im_einsatz/!ut/p/z1/hU67DoIwFP0WB9beG4gobhUXlcEIidDFFKhFrZTUAn6-GDYj8WznmQMMUmA1766S26uuuRp4xvzzehklkRu4bpSEIVJ_7m72wRFx68HpX4ANNk6AIsSlgGzYWExuUB9iYMBuvOMv0mhjlbCEF5-HkFW8LpU46IKOwg6YVDofr9M695YSmBEXYYQhrRnkytrmuXLQwb7vidRaKkEKTdq7g79KlX5aSL-z0DzSHr256iI6ewOz1RK_/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/#par4> (viewed 1 November 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Demmer, Ulrike and Feldenkirchen, Markus, ‘Ein deutsches Verbrechen’, *Der Spiegel*, 1 February 2010, pp. 34-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dirk Kurbjuweit, ‘“Auf Messers Schneide”: Nach 13 Jahren endet der Kampfeinsatz der Bundeswehr am Hindukusch’, *Der Spiegel*, 20 December 2014, pp. 18-22 (p. 19). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Andrew Plowman, ‘Defending Germany in the Hindukush: The ‘Out-of-Area’ Deployments of the Bundeswehr in Somalia, Kosovo and Afghanistan in Literature and Film’, *German Life and Letters*, 63.2 (2010), 212-28 (pp. 224-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ian Roberts, ‘The Return of the hero? Contemporary German War Films’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 7.4 (2014), 365-80. On the concept of the soldier as ‘citizen in uniform’, see David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 177-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Kai Köhler, ‘Frieden, Nation, Kultur: Ambivalenzen in deutschsprachigen Werken zum Krieg in Afghanistan’, in *Kriegdiskurse in Literatur und Medien nach 1989*, ed. by Carsten Gauch and Heinrich Kaulen (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 275-96 (p. 278). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Stefan Hermes, ‘“Guten Morgen, Afghanistan!” Der Bundeswehreinsatz am Hindukusch als literarisches Sujet’, in *Morgenland und Moderne: Orient-Diskurse in der deutschspachigen Literatur von 1850 bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 221-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York: Allen Lane, 1997), p. xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, pp. 3-5, 16 and 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Noah Yuval Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 1-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Harari, *The Ultimate Experience*, pp. 1-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 6-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hermes, “’Guten Morgen, Afghanistan!”’, p. 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Julia Encke, ‘Es wird geschossen, es geht jetzt los. Der Journalist Dirk Kurbjuweit erzählt in seinem Roman “Kriegsbraut” vom Ernstfall’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 6 March 2011, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Iris Radisch, ‘Naturkunde des Soldaten’, *Die Zeit*, 12 March 2015, ‘Literatur’, pp. 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ralph Gerstenberg, ‘Krise Kriegen: Wie der deutsche Gegenwartsroman an die Brennpunkte der Welt reist’, ‘SWR2 Literatur’, SWR2, broadcast 10 March 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Christa Karpenstein-Eßbach, *Orte der Grausamkeit: Die Neuen Kriege in der Literatur* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Karpenstein-Eßbach, *Orte der Grausamkeit*, pp. 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Karpenstein-Eßbach, *Orte der Grausamkeit,* pp. 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Karpenstein-Eßbach, *Orte der Grausamkeit*, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
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