

Dreaming of War in Iraq: a Preliminary Report

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INTRODUCTION

In earlier writings I have explored the political dimensions of dreams in relation to Charlotte Beradt's study of dreams in Nazi Germany (1), U.S. Presidential elections(2), people's self-reports of political ideology (3), and the terrorist attack of September 11 (4). The basic argument I have been building in these texts is that dreams have directly meaningful connections to the political environments in which the dreamers live. I am seeking to refute the notion (advocated by Sigmund Freud and Calvin Hall (5) among others) that dreaming is exclusively concerned with the private world of the individual and does not have anything meaningful to say about the broader social world. On the contrary, I contend that certain dreams do indeed speak directly and meaningfully to the most urgent questions of public and political affairs in the dreamer's waking life. To be sure, by far the majority of people's dreams do not include any overt reference to political themes. But the evidence I

have been gathering provides empirical support for the claim that a significant number of dreams do contain explicit political references and thus offer new insights into the conflicts, crises, and controversies that pervade the dreamer's political world. To this extent, the dreams are consistent with G. William Domhoff's continuity hypothesis (6), by which dream content is seen as an accurate gauge of the major emotional concerns of the dreamer's waking life (although the periodic discontinuities between dream content and waking (political) life are also important). Looking at the phenomenon from a broader theoretical perspective, dreams with explicit political references are worthy of study because they reflect an unusually dynamic interplay of physiological, psychological, cultural, and even religious forces, all swirling together with creative, recombinatory tension in the private visionary arena of the nocturnal imagination.

The present study is an exploration of political-oriented dreaming in the context of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, which began on March 19, 2003 and ended (in terms of major combat operations) approximately a month later, on April 14. When the war initially broke out I posted a research request in several American publications and electronic forums, and I contacted dozens of colleagues, teachers, researchers, and students who in turn distributed my request to other people.

To date, 26 people have shared detailed accounts of their war-related dreams with me. Seven of these people are male, nineteen female. Three of them are not U.S. citizens, although

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two are currently living in this country. Only five of the respondents supported the U.S. decision to go to war, or at least were not overly troubled by it; all the other respondents were strongly opposed to the war. Three initial observations can be made about this response to the research request. First, the number of responses was fairly small, particularly when compared to the much larger number of dream reports that came in the immediate aftermath of September 11 (4). This surely reflects the limited and unsystematic distribution of my research request. It may also reflect the relatively minimal degree of personal fear Americans feel when contemplating the war in Iraq, in contrast to the traumatizing shock and vulnerability that so many people felt in the immediate aftermath of September 11. Second, the gender imbalance is striking, though perhaps not surprising given that American women tend to take a much greater interest in dreams than do American men (1,7). Third, the respondents were mostly from the “anti-war” side of the political spectrum. This is likely due to the generally liberal/progressive political orientation of the groups I contacted (e.g., dream researchers, religion and psychology scholars, residents of the San Francisco Bay Area). Perhaps it is also due to the rather obvious fact that “pro-war” people are not as emotionally frustrated by the Iraq invasion as those who opposed the war, and thus (following the continuity hypothesis) are not dreaming about it as much.

So, before turning to a consideration of the dreams themselves, the following qualifications need to be noted. The dreams I gathered are certainly not representative of what Americans in general are dreaming. To the extent that most Americans have supported the war, these dreams at best reflect the sentiments of a minority of the U.S. population. My approach to the dreams does not, therefore, aim at providing broad, sweeping claims about national trends in oneiric experience. Rather, I am more interested in highlighting the creative details and meaning-rich images, feelings, and sensations that

distinguish each individual dream. Along with that, I look to identify significant themes in the dreams that may be fruitfully compared to themes I have found in my previous studies of politically related dreams, with the goal of highlighting both the common characteristics of these dreams and their intriguingly idiosyncratic, bizarrely distinctive qualities. Finally, as someone who is strongly opposed to the war and who has struggled to make sense of the fast-moving transformations of the past several weeks, I confess to the personal interest of seeking in these dream reports some insight into my own confused thoughts, turbulent feelings, and flashes of spiritual despair during this violent moment in history.

PERSONAL SYMBOLS

One of the first things I noticed in my studies of politically related dreams was the phenomenon of “personal symbols,” by which a dream includes an explicit reference to a political figure or event as a symbolic expression of something involving the dreamer’s personal life. Such dreams correspond to Frederick Perls’ notion that every feature of a dream represents a part of the dreamer’s own psyche; they also relate to C.G. Jung’s view that some dreams can be interpreted at a “subjective level” by which all the images reflect internal psychological dynamics (8). There is little controversy about this approach to dreams with manifest political content, and I suspect even Freud and Hall would have no problem acknowledging the symbolic reference to the latent content of the dreamer’s personal life.

Several of the war in Iraq dreams I have gathered include personal symbols in this sense. Kerri, a 39-year old college counselor from California, had this dream on March 21:

I am waiting at a cross-walk trying to get across the street. The warning light is flashing alternately green and red in rapid succession WALK, DON'T WALK, WALK, DON'T WALK, WALK, etc. At the

same time, cars with anonymous drivers are whizzing by. I am active in trying to get across the street, trying to time my sprint between the cars. One car comes along that is occupied by several people whom I recognize as citizens of Iraq, from all walks of life. Walking, I cross the street comfortably and safely after they pass.

Regarding the Iraq conflict, Kerri is not strongly opposed or in favor—"I am for peace but support war when necessary," and she felt this dream had nothing to do with Iraq, but rather was "purely personal" and related directly to a situation in her current life—"in my dream (and in reality) it's clear that I'm going to walk, the question is when." The presence of the Iraqi people driving quickly past her does not refer to anything in particular about the war in Iraq, but rather serves to emphasize this personal life theme of movement, change, and translocation—she's going to walk.

Two of the men who reported dreams to me also drew upon the war imagery to express emotions relating to personal life situations. Gary, a 44-year old teacher from Massachusetts, described several dreams involving war and conflict, all of which he felt related to his difficulties in organizing a new educational program at his school. *"I was in [the nearby town of] Ashville and there was a war or battle that was going to happen soon. I knew that the front line battle was going to be very dangerous and most everyone was going to die. I had no idea who the enemy was or why I was even involved."* Phil, a 40-year old accountant from Washington, had this dream on March 20: *"A huge space ship is invading the earth. I'm afraid my family will be killed, and civilization as we know it will end My heart is pounding, I'm surrounded by total chaos..."* Phil has been struggling recently to deal with various "chaotic" situations at home and at work, and his dream picks up on and dramatically exaggerates the invasion imagery of the Iraq war (which started with an initial barrage of high-technology missiles and bombs) as a way of expressing his troubled feelings about his personal life.

OP-ED COMMENTARIES

Personal symbol dreams may of course be regarded as evidence in support of the view of Freud, Hall, and others that even dreams with explicit political imagery are not in fact "about" politics, but rather are like all other dreams in focusing exclusively on the private concerns of the dreamer. However, other war-related dreams reflect an unmistakably broader concern with public events that cannot be interpreted (away) as merely personal symbols. I think of these dreams as oneiric "op-ed commentaries" in the sense that they articulate feelings, ideas, and attitudes about political realities in terms that challenge conventional waking perspectives. Just as op-ed articles in newspapers provide a thought-provoking alternative to the official pronouncements of the editorial page, certain unusual dreams offer awareness-expanding visions of community situations that are causing difficulty, stress, and uncertainty in waking consciousness.

Leah, a 41-year old physical therapist from Israel and now living in the U.S., had this dream on April 5 while staying at her mother and grandmother's house in Philadelphia:

In order recall; last part of dream written first etc. I'm in a mess tent - huge, heated tall, super/duper tent - in line, the trays are gleaming made from technologically evolved material, hot meals thousands of them- efficient, the army runs on its stomach. As i stand there I'm aware of this tent where magically all is clean, gleaming, efficient, orderly those metallic/silver poles on which one glides their tray from the other side piping hot. i see the steam rising from the food (there are no servers on the other side) thousands of piping hot meals awaiting, "nothing is spared" there are other soldiers (i think I'm one too but I'm not dressed as one, actually I'm more like a silent ghost like figure- the soldiers look more like astronauts in those special fiber suits and with helmets on, the tent is cavernous.

(next image)- packages - a big net (like the kind they airdrop). i see the net on the ground and I'm

aware of orange - (orange package/orange object) it's the kind of orange that road workers wear, bright neon orange vests. Within this net on a ground that is very bleak - sand colored (like the landscape of Iraq on tv - not clear if I'm receiving a package or sending one as i stand gathered with others at this place. - the dream figure (me) has a quality of being amidst others but "not of them" aberration? ghostlike, not in form, but in quality of presence - the term that comes to me as i write it down is "silent witness"

next image- (this is actually the first of these three) I'm interacting with people (here I'm actually interacting - engaged with them but on an opposing stand but there is communicative exchange). i stand alone - against this "Iraqi landscape background" they want me - they're inviting. i have a faint sense of the form of temptation having sexual connotations as though there is a man among them that if I were to join them i could also be with him, he wants me (sexual attraction)but if I don't join them he will not "be" with me. there is me physically standing across from them, apart in a inner conflict with myself. I stand there.

Another image - hospital - people in bunks high up (tent is big in height) something blue - a blue light - like a light from an opened refrigeration door but in a bluish tint - eerie - silent - injured little girl (i don't see her i just know she's there somewhere) she gets a package the dreamer has an awareness that outside is hell- desert/stark chaotic conditions but within these 2 cavernous tents it's "safe", "clean" technologically advanced, special fibers material, orderly. as though:" you see once you come over to us (even injured) life is better" -

Leah said afterwards that the dream's imagery is true to her fervent anti-war feelings ("I tried [to share the dream] with my mother but she is a hawk in the way I'm a dove"). All the gleaming technology in the military mess tent and the hospital, combined with the threat-tinged sexual invitation from the unknown man and her felt sense of being "ghostlike" and a "silent witness," gave a vivid imagistic expression to Leah's waking view that the U.S. invasion of Iraq represents an aggressive "declaration that THIS

is the only way to live...sort of colonial imperialism...(without necessarily physically occupying) America can take what she needs and the return to other countries are these technological benefits...which also create an addiction to the U.S."

Marti, a 45-year old unemployed journalist from Turkey, had this dream on March 22. It was, she said "the first time I was ever raped in a dream."

"I was in a very big and luxury house, like a labyrinth. There are another woman and some men in the house. The men are wanting to rape us. The other woman was rather willing against them. I was trying to escape from the man in the labyrinth-like house. But when I lock a door, I see a new door which men can enter. So I go on from rooms to rooms, floors up to floors down. All this time the other woman was in a good relation with the man. I came aware of I am dreaming (but not like lucidity). Though I know I was dreaming and try to direct the dream preventing to be raped by the man in the house. All my efforts were useless. They catch and raped me a few times. I even hurt, broke heads of some of them in my try to escape from rape. The other woman was a dark brunette, very sexy and seems like having satisfaction with their rapes (it was not like rape but rather willingly intercourse to her). In a way, I realized, she was acting like that to get the attention of the men to herself in order to protect me. Everything went on like this for a long time in the house. Then I somehow I realized that the house is in fact a web page about dreams of video games. And I was one of the characters in the video game who has to win and get out of the labyrinth.

Marti said she rarely remembers dreams with overt sexual content, so this one definitely stood out for her. The men in the dream felt to her like direct symbols of the forces invading and bombing Iraq, with "being raped representing the attack to my beliefs and peace wanting soul. The other woman is maybe the 'other me' (the fighter me) trying to protect the 'more vulnerable me' from the rape." The labyrinthine

house suggested to Marti the uncertainty she and everyone felt about what would come of the American invasion—where would it all lead? The semi-lucidity enhanced her sense that she had to make urgent decisions to protect herself, even though she realizes the futility of all her efforts. The video games reminded Marti of her sons, who occasionally play them; a complex concluding image, both a wishful escape (“it’s all just a game”) and a foreboding of peril to come (her children playing at war, readying themselves for the adult world of real war).

Sandra, a 41-year old California woman, dreamed on March 20, right after the war started, that:

“We were in an area of land--this bad guy (dictator like--no clear features but dark hair medium height and build) had a key to break up one part of the land. Someone else had another key which was a disc (small like a coin, silver-gray colored--sometimes plastic looking other times more metallic in appearance). The bad guy got a hold of that key too. I think he used the keys. We were running (who was not clear--may not have been me--there was a female with brown straight hair). The land started to crack beneath the group and oceans of water lay underneath. I awoke feeling terrified or an adrenaline rush--like fight or flight reaction. At the same time it felt like I was watching a Star Trek adventure or like I was in outer space or on another planet.

Sandra said the dream “nagged at me throughout the day,” and she knew it related directly to the war, even though she had not been paying much attention to the media coverage of the conflict. “I’m sure the earth cracking is metaphoric of how I feel about this whole world situation and that the ocean lies underneath reminds me of just how powerful the ocean can be (reminds me of cycle of birth, death, and rebirth).” The bad guy is certainly reminiscent of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, although the fact that the dream character remains a more generalized antagonist points to a deeper level of emotional distress—Sandra is

not simply afraid of Saddam Hussein, she is afraid of how the war in Iraq is setting loose destructive powers that threaten the very foundations of the world. The ocean underneath hints at a dimension of spiritual hope amid the fear and panic, although the science fiction framing at the end may (like Marti’s dream of the video game) reflect a wish that none of this was really happening.

Gerhard, a 42-year old college teacher and author in California, did as much as he could to stop the war—he marched for peace, wrote and phoned the government, gave money, spoke in class, engaged in lengthy email discussions, etc. Once the war started, however, he found himself surprisingly unsure of his anti-war stance, and he struggled with “vague and malformed ideas” about what should happen next. He had this dream on March 27:

“I was on a tropical island (I recall the fringing coral beyond the beaches). I was not a resident; no doubt I was there for the diving. The island was occupied by white people and, on the beach, I met a young and affable Asian man who was going to try to reclaim it. We talked and, though I don't remember the conversation, I made a joke about him staying away from the war. I felt ashamed when he then told me he was going to attempt a landing on the beach, right then. He then got into a canoe, with many other men, looking like a Hawaiian war party. I followed on the beach as they headed up to the end of the bay we were on. As they neared the shore again they were joined by another canoe but then the hills erupted in automatic weapons fire. As thousands of rounds tore the water around them, I marveled at how they were not being hit. But soon they were. Somehow by this time I had gotten far too close to the firefight. The men were hitting land and their enemies in the hills were coming down to engage them. I retraced my steps, but as I was walking I realized the enemy were all around. I further realized I looked exactly like the invaders: there was no way to tell I was not a combatant, and I was no more than 100 yards from the thick of the battle. My memory of the dream ends with me in the sand where I had thrown myself,

looking up at a passing patrol of soldiers, desperately hoping they would not see or shoot me. But I believe that here the soldiers were inimical and Asian, neither the invaders, nor whites.

The tropical/Asian setting reminded Gerhard of wonderful vacations he had taken to Hawaii and Australia, and also of his awareness of the colonialist violence that the native people of those islands had suffered through history at the hands of white Euro-Americans like himself. His vigorous opposition to the war in Iraq certainly grew out of his general feelings about that historical legacy of racial/religious colonialism, and thus the dream accurately reflects his waking life political opposition to the Bush administration's policies on Iraq. However, the dream does something more than that—it highlights the profound uncertainties he is now feeling as he tries to adapt those political views to the actual unfolding of the war. “In fact, I am the strangest thing in the dream. Where most of my dreams are highly unlikely or clearly impossible, this one was almost naturalistic but for one thing: the bizarre behavior and physical transformation of its main character, me. I don't see an easy explanation for this one, but am irresistibly reminded of a dream I had during the war on Afghanistan. In that dream I was an Afghani, watching the bombs drop like poisonous leaves on my country. But here, who am I? Am I an occupier in the beginning? Am I an invader at the end? Or have we all somehow switched races?”

Judy is a 48-year old health care professional in California who agreed with the need to use military force against Iraq even though she worried about all the deaths that would result. She had this dream on March 18, just before the first missile strikes on Baghdad:

“The dream was my husband and I were going to Hawaii for a vacation. Somehow we were separated and I had to pass through this hall and the hall was made up of many faces of all races. I passed through the hall as the faces were speaking or

making faces at me and then I'm in the open. There were people around like sight seeing and all of a sudden the mountains they were looking at started crumbling and big pieces of cement, etc, fell and hit people, killing them. I ran up a hill of sand and finally got to level ground. I'm looking around for my husband and can't find him but then the mountains on that side start to crumble and I run again, through the hall of faces and races. I come out on the other side but have not been able to connect with my husband.

Also, the mountains had the faces of Mount Rushmore in them too and that was the cement part of the falling pieces.”

Even though Judy is, in waking life, a supporter of the American war effort, she still feels deep misgivings about where the invasion will lead, and those concerns surface in her dream. The hall of faces from all races gave her a clear sense of tension between her American cultural beliefs and those of other people around the world. “They are not mean, but they are not exactly in ‘sync’ with my beliefs.” The striking image of Mount Rushmore crumbling to pieces made a strong impression on her—“I think it was showing a crumbling of the U.S. as we know it and a devastation that we did not expect.” In those deadly pieces of rock and cement raining down from the ultimate monument to American presidential power, Judy saw an omen boding that, for good or for ill, “we are entering into a new era.”

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The “op-ed commentary” dreams just presented are all fairly continuous with the dreamer's waking life political views. Other dreams, however, involve images and feelings that run counter to the person's ordinary outlook. The political discontinuities have the effect of prompting new conscious reflection on particular issues or conflicts, in some cases actually altering the individual's waking life attitude. These dreams correspond closely with

what Jung called the compensatory function of dreaming. Although researchers like Domhoff argue that compensation is inadequate as a comprehensive theory of dream function (9), the evidence that Jung and others have provided is sufficient to demonstrate that at least some dreams have a compensatory effect on people's waking consciousness.

Stella, a 60-year old teacher and counselor in Georgia, dreamed this on April 3: "I am standing on a hill with a finely dressed woman. She has some white and some colors in her dress. The wind is blowing. She says something like Saddam is going to blow the world up, something like that. That is her worry thought. I think of how she is a worrier, yet I feel a bit of concern myself". The previous day Stella had read in the paper a threatening quote from one of Saddam Hussein's sons, and she was surprised at how much it upset her since had not been very concerned about the war so far, even though she knew many people around her were quite agitated and fearful. (One of her favorite teachers had always encouraged her not to focus any attention on negative media stories.) Looking at her dream in this context, Stella regarded the woman as an exemplar of a "fine personality," the hill as a "higher perspective," and the wind as "the Holy Spirit, the sacred." Seeing that in this lofty, serene setting the finely dressed woman gives voice to a terrible feeling of danger and vulnerability, Stella is able to recognize a similar emotion in herself, although in a less intense form. "In my dream I admit to feeling some concern, which is more than I wanted to admit prior to my dream. I am grateful for this realization; if I do not acknowledge feeling fear, I will be unable to deal with it."

David, a 55-year old health care technician in North Carolina, had this dream on February 28, about three weeks before the start of the war, which he bitterly opposed ("Quite frankly I think the invasion of Iraq is a cynical ploy to inflate Mr. Bush's approval ratings, discredit the United Nations and protect the interests of an avaricious economic minority").

HOUSE BEARING ELEPHANTS AND BIRDS CAGED IN THE ATTIC

I notice a movement in the corner of my eye and turn to see something large and dark coming toward me. After a moment it resolves into an elephant with a white, one story house on its back. The elephant proceeds to a far corner of the parking lot on which I am standing. I study the house as I walk across the lot. It is sided with rough textured, pressed board and looks like the kind of temporary building one often sees serving as offices on used car lots. I look down to find there are now four elephants. Looking back up I see the little building is now buried in one corner of a much larger, multi-storied version of itself on the backs of the four elephants. From within the original building I hear a man's voice say, "Look! I got a campaign to run here!" I see a digital clock face which reads, "6:15" and realize it is time for me to go home. As I am about to leave I remember several cockatiels are caged in the attic of the white building and I must see they are fed before I can go. I climb a ladder made of 2x4s to the attic. The bird cages are made of wire mesh and have been build between the rafters and struts of the roof. It is difficult to see into one cage which contains a normal gray, male cockatiel. I cannot see any seed dish at all in this cage and become very anxious, wondering how long the bird has gone unfed. I stand on tip-toe to look into the bottom of the cage hoping to see a dish there but, instead, I find a goldfinch in summer plumage, lying on its side, dead. I worry that if I move it I will create a bad smell and a big mess which may be unhealthy for the cockatiel, then I wonder, with horror, if the cockatiel has been feeding on the dead bird in lieu of seed. I am torn between the need to deal with the dead bird and my desire to get home.

The first thing to note is that this dream does not contain any explicit reference to the imminent war. It would be extremely difficult to devise a keyword search that could reliably identify this as a war-related dream. And yet for David, the dream is

absolutely an explicit expression of his thoughts and feelings about the current political situation. This was his initial reaction to the dream: “The elephant, of course, is a symbol of the Republican Party the which is further emphasized by the White House on its back.” The elephant moves to a position opposite (ideologically) to where David is standing, and then the house swells in size and there are four elephants instead of one—“much as the Republicans and Bush have increased in power lately.” The man’s voice shouting “I have a campaign to run!” is for David a transparent political reference to his scornful waking life attitude toward the President and his administration.

The final section of the dream, with the cockatiels and the dead goldfinch, carries the political reference to a new allegorical height, moving beyond his strongly held personal views to a surprisingly new point of view on the whole situation and his role within it. The ladder of 2x4s is a peculiar symbol David has noticed in his dreams for years, and he has come to see the rough-hewn, hand-made nature of the ladders as a reflection of his underlying belief that he has to “make my own way up” in life. The “normal gray, male cockatiel” David could not help but associate with himself, while the “goldfinch with summer plumage” struck him as symbolizing “the Sweet Bird of Youth.” In that context, his intense reaction (“I wonder, with horror”) to the possibility that the cockatiel has been eating the goldfinch led him to this humbling personal and political realization: “To paraphrase the adage, young people fight wars that old people start. It is also true that ‘normal gray’ people live in and benefit from economies bolstered by wars, so my ambivalent feelings about dealing with the dead goldfinch could be a reflection of a desire not to acknowledge the ways in which I, myself, feed on the young sacrificed in war and the responsibility I bear because I have tolerated the actions of Bush's government.”

EMPATHETIC IDENTIFICATIONS AND FEARFUL ANTICIPATIONS

The psychological and spiritual impact of the war can be seen in those dreams in which the dreamer identifies with people who are directly involved in the combat. Gerhard’s dream of being caught in the fighting on the tropical island and trying desperately to hide is one example of this. Several other reports I received included this vivid personal experience of being in the war. William, a 54-year old college professor from Massachusetts, dreamed on March 14 that “*I am watching four young American fighter pilots be strapped into one man fighter planes with oxygen masks being fastened on their faces, almost as if they are being bound down for execution or torture. I awake in terror with feelings of being suffocated.*” Jenny, a 51-year old librarian from Ohio, also dreamed on March 14 that “*Somehow I am with a large group of people who are being chased by an army—there is one person in charge (Saddam?) who wants us all killed. We find a large building like a castle to hide in.*” From the other side of the ideological divide, James, a 36-year old student and former Air Force weapons specialist, has had several dreams in which “*I am teaching classes to new airmen on Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Warfare. I was in civilian clothes and we were in a classroom.*” James is a strong supporter of President Bush’s approach to Iraq, and while he was in the Air Force his training focused on weapons of mass destruction, “so I think the dreams have to do with wanting to help in an area that I know.”

Following September 11 I heard numerous reports of dreams in which people’s homes and neighborhoods were attacked by bombs, missiles, terrorists, and/or military forces. Although I have gathered fewer of these dreams during the war in Iraq, a few vivid examples have been reported. Jackie, a 40-year old writer from California, dreamed on March 20 that “*I am in the hills, there are trees around me, very healthy trees. I am anxious, there are explosions in the distance, coming closer and closer to where I*

am. I do not know where the next one will be and am confused about which way to go." For Jackie the dream was a very direct expression of her fearful attitude toward the war—"I feel helpless and fear the unknown future. I am conflicted about what to do but I feel like I have to do something." Tommy, a 12-year old boy from California, dreamed in early March that the Golden Gate Bridge (which in waking life he sees every day from his home) was a "mangled wreck" following a terrible battle; he also dreamed that he was dead and had come back in the form of a grown man to visit his mother, who was now an elderly woman. Gracie, a 19-year old college student in North Carolina, dreamed in late February that *"I was watching the news and suddenly discovered we were bombing Iraq. I was so upset that we were bombing the poor Iraqis and I saw so many people dying. It was a very distressing dream, and it seemed very life-like. When I woke up I was sure that we had started bombing, when we had not yet begun."*

One of the most moving stories I have heard so far involves Melody, a 41-year old technical writer in Alabama who strongly opposed the war (even though most of the people in her community were equally strong supporters of it). The first night following the invasion she had unclear, disturbing dreams of bombs dropping.

"The second night is much clearer and more elaborate. It started with bombs dropping and soon evolved into a sort of science fiction scenario with underground bunkers and force fields and so forth. These force fields could automatically recognise friend from foe -- that baffled me and, frankly, worried me that I would maybe not be able to get in. Above ground was like a sprawling housing project and I remember wondering how the drainage and so forth for those buildings didn't interfere with the underground, which wasn't very far underground at all. But once you got into the underground you were safe: the force fields made you safe from the bombing that was going on overhead. They were trying out new kinds of bombs

that were just flashes in the sky, like neutron bombs, I suppose, designed to kill but not to destroy the buildings. "I'm not sure".

Melody admitted that "I'm having difficulties in my personal and professional life because of my anti-war stance." A few days after the dream, she became involved in a contentious email exchange with her co-workers (they were soliciting charitable donations for U.S. troops in Iraq, and she replied by suggesting her colleagues visit an Oxfam web site), with the result that she became a pariah in the office and an object of scorn and derision from her colleagues. "I am still involved with discussions between me, my manager, and human resources. Basically, it's an extremely uncomfortable position to be in right now, and you can rest assured that absolutely no one has stopped by my desk to support my input." Much as her dream anticipated, Melody found herself in a high-tech war environment where she is in danger of being split off from her erstwhile friends and cast into the militarily targeted category of "foe"; the only hope of survival is to move herself (and her minority political opinions) "underground," where she can't be seen or heard.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS: RELIGION AND WAR

Whether one is for or against the war in Iraq, the religious dimensions of the conflict are an important and undeniable reality. The rise of radical Islam as a challenge to American national security, the disproportionate influence of ultraorthodox Jews on Israeli policies toward the Palestinians, the friction between Sunni and Shi'ite branches of Islam, the proudly assertive and evangelical Christian faith of President Bush, the opposition to war by the official leadership of nearly all American religious denominations, the historical context of Europeans and Americans launching colonial/missionary/crusading efforts in the

Middle East—all of these factors make religion perhaps the single greatest overarching issue in the war in Iraq. I want to end this preliminary report with a dream that highlights some of the religious complexities involved in the present conflict. Kate, a 42-year old health care worker in Ohio from the anti-war camp, had this dream on March 18:

“War in our country: bombed buildings and roads, and I was in a car driving to escape. Our church had collapsed before the war began and dozens of national guardsmen had come to fix it. They surrounded the stone structure and piles of rubble shoulder to shoulder wearing uniforms and helmets, even carrying guns. I discussed with my pastor how much it appeared like a war scene. “Isn't it ironic that our church would fall at the same time as the war, and that soldiers would come to help us?”

Kate said her church is currently in the process of remodeling its 130-year old stone building, so her dream certainly has that direct connection to her life. When I asked her about her church's attitude toward the war, she told me of the congregation's long history of anti-war activism and her own enthusiastic participation in the protests leading up to the current conflict in Iraq. The opening of her dream seems to reflect, consistent with the political views of herself and her church, a frightened sense that warfare and bloodshed are on the rise everywhere and are

even threatening her home community. However, at this point something a little odd happens. The church is in ruins, as if it has been struck by a bomb, but Kate knows that in fact the church fell down before the war started. Her capacity to recognize the irony of the situation—soldiers during wartime helping rebuild an anti-war church that collapsed prior to the war—is, I suspect, a healthy sign of psychological and spiritual reintegration amid the confusing chaos of the historical moment. Despite the destructive forces of war consuming her country, despite the presence of armed troops right before her, she feels no personal threat in what's happening. On the contrary, she appreciates the help of the national guardsmen in rebuilding her church. “The soldiers seemed to be working to shore up the remaining structure and to protect people from further collapse. At the time I had the dream, the war was just beginning and I was certain that it was an enormous mistake. I feel much more conflicted now than I did before it started, as I see the Iraqi response to the US presence... I still feel we made a terrible mistake, but maybe the consequences won't be as dire as I had imagined.”

A violent war, a crumbled church, a military trying to make things better—in dreaming as in waking, Kate and many people like her are struggling with sharp fragments of image, emotion, and history, trying to reorient themselves to a world they no longer recognize.

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