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Adoration Among Warring Nations: A Look At War Brides From World War Two, Vietnam, And Iraq

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ADORATION AMONG WARRING NATIONS:
A LOOK AT WAR BRIDES FROM WORLD WAR TWO, VIETNAM, AND IRAQ

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Introduction
Love and War

Wars succeed or fail just like relationships. Measuring the affect of the U.S. military in foreign lands can be done with many different tools. The uncommon mechanism for this particular research is war brides. Why citizens from other countries choose to engage in relationships with American military personnel and marry them provides a unique insight about troops and the wars they fight in foreign countries. War bride information is not well documented, however, which leaves a gap in the full understanding of conflicts on and off the battlefield. This particular study uses a culmination of numerous interviews with actual war brides and articles outlining their lives to help command a greater perspective on the relationships and conflicts over time and overseas during World War Two, the Vietnam War, and lastly the present conflict in Iraq. The use of these three wars provides information about unique conflicts throughout variant time periods, places and cultures.

Welded Women
How the sculptor has seen us, sisters:
Robuster than female, while spare
And Shafty, iron-knuckled at the ends
Of forearms like tongs. With feet anchored
Upon forge-fittings, we can move
Clankingly nowhere, can only bend
In a unison our blackened articulate
Bones, in a barricade against whoever comes,
Supple, unwelded, walking behind, walking
Before, searching linkage’s weakness. How we
See our sculpturing, sisters: what’s fair
In art’s fair in love and war. Welded
Arm to arm, anchored on stone, move
As one from the bridals to widowings,
Marry and mourn, match an enemy’s
Wits, bind up the besieged, the alone,
The weak and the strong, loving
The soldier that steels our bond (Westerfield, 40).
Chapter 1

Heaving Hearts in Britain

It’s estimated that one million American soldiers married foreign women between the years of 1942 and 1952, and of this million, 100,000 were British (Wilt). Considering that only men were permitted to serve in the U.S. military at that time all accounts of marriage are between American men and British women. Thirteen million U.S. soldiers were deployed throughout Europe and Asia during World War Two from 1941 through 1945. Entering the war on the side of the Allies in December of 1941, American troops were welcomed with open arms in Britain. With the same cultural background and language American soldiers easily integrated into British society and entered into relationships with local women.

British girls blushed as they were greeted with the universal salutation, “Hi ya, cutie!” from American soldiers (Church). The American soldiers’ appeal to British women resigned in their polite manners combined with an intriguing accent and charm. These men enjoyed much of the same activities as their British counterparts while introducing thrilling new ones such as the jitterbug. The soldiers used their resources to have a good time and take the girls’ minds off the emotionally draining war. Eventually some of these men presented more than a few dates and provided a way for some women to get out of Britain and the all consuming war. One bride described her home atmosphere in the following manner: “We were called Hellfire Corner. We were bombed, we were shelled, we were machine-gunned. We had warships coming and shooting shells on the beaches...We were civil defense workers. We all had to wear the tin hats” (Tuss). The American military represented a way of life no longer familiar to these young women. One could argue that necessity ultimately attracted British women to
American soldiers’ because not only did they find love in a polite man with similar interests, but also a path to a life with more wealth and opportunities. Adoration mixed with the allure of a better life aided the fall of many into war-time romances with American soldiers.

The lingering possibility of achieving wealth and security with a U.S. soldier was intriguing for young British women. As one woman stated, “Initially American soldiers were, for many, virtually mythological creatures, seen as symbols of hope for an end to the war. They were Santa Clause who had so much…” (Kohl). The women could not help their awe of the United States and the vast resources that it contributed to the war effort against the Axis powers. War brides from overseas recalled their astonishment when they arrived in the U.S. to find stores lined with countless varieties of food. This shock comes as no surprise considering that during the war, Germany made a point to block the importation of food supplies to Britain in an attempt to starve its adversary into submission. The country imported over 70% of its foodstuffs and the German blockade severely limited the country’s supply of basic food (Rationing in the United Kingdom).

As a result of Germany’s blockade, Britain was forced to ration all of its supplies. War bride Marie Houtz was interviewed by Seena Kohl, a professor of anthropology at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri for an article published about war brides in the magazine Montana: The Magazine of Western History. During her interview she described a taste of the American way of life one cold Christmas: “We were sitting in the dark. We couldn’t get any coal. It was cold and all of a sudden there was a knock on the door and it was Earl and he had all these brightly wrapped gifts. We didn’t have a Christmas tree or a gift in the house because everything was rationed and my family just
fell in love with him” (Houtz). American soldiers represented a renewed way of life, much different than the war-torn atmosphere in Britain.

American soldiers were a beacon of hope amidst a country in turmoil. Evelyn Tuss, a war bride from Yorkshire, England now residing in Montana, described how her mother invited soldiers over for dinner because she felt badly for them. The young men did not know that often times one dinner was the family’s ration for an entire week. The government rationed families to only two ounces of bacon, one ounce of lard, and one quarter pound of meat a week (Tuss). When one young soldier named Frank Tuss started coming around Evelyn’s house more often bringing food for her mother, he won not only Evelyn’s heart, but her mother’s as well.

In the context of World War Two Frank and Evelyn’s courtship and love was as romantic as one could be. Romance and love in this context could be defined not as a single feeling, but an emotion molded from two or more feelings. This definition suggests that Evelyn’s love was rooted not only in a feeling of compassion for Frank, but was also combined with feelings, including comfort and opportunity, which ultimately combined and fueled her war-time affair. One might consider these circumstances and conclude that the love spawned between soldiers and civilians during World War Two may have been more complex than the relationships that develop today. In a time of dire conditions the little things in life become very important, and are not so often passed over. Materialistic comforts did not matter and these women found men who would honestly and truly take care of them for better or worse as Frank did with Evelyn.

Food was not the only apportioned item during the war; wedding dresses and clothing in general were rationed as well. Clothing was allotted on a point system that
provided for approximately one outfit a year. In the dire years points were reduced to make the purchase of a coat an entire year’s clothing (Rationing in the United Kingdom). In order to improvise for their wedding day women would ask their American fiancés for an old parachute from the military because they were made out of silk that could be converted into a dress. Evelyn asked Frank for one, and when it arrived she opened it to find silk camouflage, not exactly what she was looking for. She instead borrowed a dress, and they were married in her home town church with 100 attendants (Tuss). At that time the church bells never rung unless there was an air raid, but when they came out of the church on their wedding day the bells were ringing and ringing. It was August 15th 1945, Victory over Japan Day, and the war was finally over— the armistice was signed (Tuss).

Young soldiers often experienced a culture shock, and a feeling of loneliness while overseas. Amidst a new culture, and because of their young age not fully aware of who they were to begin with, soldiers found comfort with local girls. Aligning with someone from a new place gave them something to grasp onto as they attempted to figure themselves out during their military deployment (Swartout). Soldiers became lonely in this new place away from family and friends. British women were there to fill that void. English girls enjoyed the same pastimes such as movies, bingo and dancing. Without a language or culture barrier, it was easy for the young soldiers to connect with girls and the rest of British society.

For the adolescent male soldiers, hormones and age also encouraged relationships thousands of miles away from home (Swartout). Emotions and love are one source for romance, but hormones can sometimes exert even more influence. During World War
Two young men in the United States received their draft notices while they were still seniors in high school. By the time they finished training and set foot in another country they were often no older than nineteen, and some as young as fifteen (Swartout). A lot of research today focuses on the brain and the maturity process that occurs in humans. It is now assumed that the human brain does not fully mature and reason on an adult level until the mid to late twenties. According to Darla Sitton of CBN News, “[t]he human brain does not mature until sometime after the teenage years, and sometimes even later (Sitton).” When people reach their late teens and early twenties they are still developing and emotions often overrule our reasoning. As Sitton explains, “The part of the brain that fills in last or latest, is the part of the brain involved in decision making, controlling our impulses.” This flood of emotions combined with a lack of personal or parental rules to govern courting gave way to many young soldiers in love for the first time as they served overseas.

Meeting women under the circumstances of war is much different than meeting in a time of peace. A person’s head is not in the same place when there are aerial bombs dropped in one’s general vicinity every day. A conflict-ridden environment challenges the normal rationale used in a relationship. War Bride Marie Houtz described it in the following manner: “We didn’t think we would live very long because, when we were married, there were still the V-2 rockets coming over and we just didn’t think we’d survive. So we didn’t think of the future . . . We just thought we were lucky to be alive that day and maybe by the end of the day we wouldn’t be” (Kohl). This type of environment, coupled with fear and inexperience, led many young couples to split second decisions about survival and love (Swartout).
When young couples married under these circumstances, it meant that they often overlooked future challenges. What would life be like in America for a young girl born and raised in a country with different cultural traditions and beliefs? Leaving everything they knew was a harsh reality for some girls when the war ended and their husbands, fiancés and boyfriends were ready to go home. As Evelyn Tuss recalled, "[I] didn’t really know. I just was in love, I guess. I just thought it would be all right no matter where we were" (Tuss). Britain’s Good Housekeeping Magazine helped prepare girls with the article “A War Bride’s Guide to the U.S.A.,” a book they put together in conjunction with the U.S. Office of War Information. The book contained information about everything from American manners to style of humor in the United States. With their guide in one hand and plenty of love in their hearts British girls managed their transition overseas.

Some brides arrived to a new family of in-laws with open arms and minds, while others were given a cold shoulder and left to fend for themselves in a new setting. More often than not, British war brides were welcomed by their new husband’s family. Evelyn was even asked to give talks to the residents in her new home town of Harlowton, Montana. She reported her greatest hardship as learning the money conversion from pounds to dollars. Elizabeth met Rick’s family in San Francisco and recalled his mother acting a bit standoffish while his father and siblings were very warm and welcoming. When Pete Berring, a war bride from Australia, arrived in Billings, she had never seen snow. She recalled her first Halloween and her confusion when kids showed up at her door dressed up and requesting candy. After she explained that they did not have this holiday in Australia and was unprepared, the kids left. A bit later Pete heard a knock at
her door and opened it to find a container of candy with a note that said, “For the lady who has no candy” (Berring). Berring’s community even created an Australia day for her. Most women interviewed for the magazine *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* usually reported entering a community alien to them, but all the while accepting as well, thus making the transition to an American way of life easier. Either way, at the end of every interview when asked if they would do it again, all the brides responded “yes”. As Elizabeth Goff stated, “This is the best thing that God could have done is sent me this man and put me into America. I must have deserved it, or he wouldn’t have been so kind” (Goff).

It was hard for some American men to attain a blessing from their fiancés’ families. While most U.S. forces were welcomed in Britain as allies, some were regarded as “over-sexed, over paid, and over here” (Kohl, 27). This unappealing reputation for soldiers proved to be a barrier for American men to overcome as they attempted to date and marry local girls. Families intentionally deterred their young women from dating these men in an attempt to keep their daughters’ reputations intact. “Yanks” were perceived as bad, and “good girls” did not date them. According to Peggy Floerchinger, another war bride:

> Oh, there was some animosity with certain people… against the American soldier…They came over at a time when we were in dire straits… We had been going without for a long time, and the American servicemen were paid a lot more than the British servicemen. Consequently they were looked upon as show-offs. You know, they’ve got all this money and especially if a British girl went out with an American, they were stealing British girls. (Kohl)
Obtaining parental permission to date a soldier with a problematic reputation was no easy feat. One bride’s father worked on the military base and often overheard the GI’s talking about the women they entertained the night before. It’s not surprising he was opposed to his daughter marrying a man like that. Young women were not deterred however, as one bride stated, “I think some people would think, ‘Why don’t you marry someone from your own country.’ But I never went out with anyone from my own country. I was only nineteen and I wanted to go out” (Kohl, 26). These soldiers may have attained a bad reputation, but they also acquired the funds to take local girls out on dates. During some of the darkest times these soldiers brought happiness to young women living through hell, something local men and family could not accomplish even with their favorable reputations.

Parental permission was not the only hard-won accomplishment for these young couples as getting around military regulations proved to be just as difficult. Elizabeth Goff, a war bride from Poland, jumped through many hoops in order to marry her husband Rick Goff. He was in an Air Force Security Outfit, and his organization for the purpose of defense did not allow men to marry local women. The two met in 1949 at a PX store located in a displaced persons’ camp where Elizabeth was relocated from Germany after the war was over (Goff). While stationed there they enjoyed movies together, rode bikes, went to dances, and played BINGO. Elizabeth intended on immigrating to the United States with Rick after his tour was over. However, she was held for an extra three months in Germany when an X-ray revealed a spot on her lung (Goff). The military may have considered the spot to be indicative of tuberculosis, a highly contagious and fatal lung disease. The extra three months at the detention center
may have been more tolerable than her mother-in-law, however, who wrote to her son before coming home inquiring, "Of all the beautiful American girls, why in God's name would you want to bring a foreigner home?" (Goff) Luckily, Frank's mother got over her bias and sponsored Elizabeth in order to finally get her to the U.S. to be with and eventually marry her son in 1951 (Goff).

One week after they were married, Frank Tuss came back to the United States but Evelyn was required to stay in England for an extra eight months. During that time she filled out all sorts of paperwork and got vaccinations to fulfill American stipulations for immigration. Frank had to find someone in his family to state they had 10,000 dollars and promised to take responsibility for Evelyn's care if anything happened to Frank (Tuss). Lastly, she was required to enter a de-toxification camp in Tidworth, England. She was there with 1,400 other girls for ten days (Tuss). While at the camp the girls were required to strip and check each other for lice, while the guards propositioned them with whiskey (Tuss). Evelyn recalls it as one of the most degrading events in her life. Finally, the girls boarded the Vulcania, a ship that took eight days to sail them across the ocean and finally into the arms of their lovers the U.S. (Tuss).

Britain and America shared a similar culture and the English language, thus creating a place much more conducive to intercultural wartime marriages. After the long journey from their home country British brides were immersed into American society almost as easily as their husbands were in Britain. However, as brides from Vietnam and Iraq have arrived in the U.S., they do not often experience the same acceptance, and are instead left with many challenges here in the United States.
Chapter 2
Fervor and Fight in Vietnam

The Vietnam War was a long, drawn out conflict in a country that bred its own distinct type of relationships between local women and American soldiers. This modern version of guerilla warfare proved to be as unfamiliar as the unique avenue men used to interact with local women. In Britain soldiers met and interacted with women much like they would in the U.S., but in Vietnam the women who interacted with soldiers were not always in it simply for love and understanding. In the Vietnamese context more so than in the British setting, American soldiers were catered to not for their personality but their profits.

According to the data provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, approximately 8,040 Vietnamese war brides entered the United States between 1947 and 1975 (Saenz et al). America was fully involved in the Vietnam conflict from 1950 until 1973. Over half a million American troops were stationed there during this time. With the large number of armed forces deployed in the region, there were plenty of soldiers to interact with the occupied community and the strong likelihood of relationships with local women.

Vietnam was an unfamiliar battle compared with World War Two. In Vietnam there was a distinct line between the north and the south, with combat zones clearly defined. This situation provided troops with a much different atmosphere. Without constant attacks, American soldiers were less apt to make split-second decisions concerning love and relationships. With ample troops working, more time was allotted for soldiers to explore the country and enjoy other activities away from the military base. This leisure time was a contributing factor to the relationships that developed with
women from Vietnam. Just as in World War Two, the vast majority of soldiers who went to Vietnam were draftees – young single men under the age of twenty. These soldiers were also lonely. They looked for comfort and support from the community and women surrounding them.

Relationships, however, were much more difficult to build in Vietnam due to the language barrier and cultural differences between the local people and American soldiers. When military men were in need of affection and relationships they did not simply meet a girl at a coffee shop or local hangout. As soldiers grew lonely and sought interaction with women, many visited camptowns, defined by Ji-Yeon Yuh, the author of Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, as “towns that revolve economically around the bases and which contain red-light districts catering to U.S. soldiers” (Yuh, 9). These towns served as a segway between the men from the military bases and local women. An estimated 90% of the women who traveled to the U.S. as military brides came from camptowns (Yuh, 9). A large number of the Vietnamese women who married American soldiers were either a club hostess or prostitute from the red light district in one of the camptowns surrounding a base (Yuh, 12).

Not all relationships were formed at camptowns, however. Many developed on military bases. The United States military usually employs local people to work on their overseas bases. Some of the Vietnamese brides met their husbands on the bases while working as secretaries, interpreters or translators. Sadly, no matter where couples interacted, most of the time the local women took interest in American men to get out of their war-infested country. Military soldiers were seen as a “meal ticket” and an escape from poverty, which led to marriages where there was no hint of a flame. Money was
clearly a factor for one bride who stated, “I thought everyone in America was rich. 
{Laughs} I thought everyone was rich” (Yuh, 55). Ironically enough, what looked like 
wealth in Vietnam did not amount to much in the United States. Most soldiers in the 
Vietnam conflict were high school graduates who came home to work an average middle-
to low-income job. However, their income at home was more than their wives ever could 
have hoped to attain alone in their own country.

Couples in Vietnam encountered many of the same problems when trying to 
obtain parental approval as couples in World War Two. Most parents in the local 
Vietnamese communities refused to see their daughters go with American soldiers 
because they knew how they most likely met them. A daughter who worked in a “red-
light district” or married a military man was an embarrassment to her family. Ms. Bai, a 
woman interviewed by Ji-Yeon Yuh, clearly illustrates why families disapprove of a 
request to marry an American soldier in the quotation below:

Well, at that time, uh, marring an American is, getting parental approval is, you 
know, people’s image of it wasn’t that good. So they said no, absolutely opposed, and 
you know, about, I will say about 80 percent, 90 percent of those who marry… I 
don’t know how to say. . . I don’t want to. . . Because I myself married an American, 
the same, women who marry Americans, I don’t want to put them down. It’s 
because I don’t want to do that that I’m speaking like this. At any rate, the image isn’t 
good, so parents oppose it. (Yuh, 56)

One can clearly understand what Ms. Bai was trying to say, as a daughter marrying an 
American military man was seen as inappropriate and associated with indecency.
It was not a requirement of GIs by any means to marry women from these towns even if they impregnated a girl; a striking difference between World War Two, in a time when ignoring responsibilities such as children would have been unthinkable. These women were more often than not considered acceptable sexual companions but not viewed as wives to bring home to the U.S. (Yuh, 14). Some men did want more than that, though. By American standards soldiers were considered normal men, but in the eyes of a Vietnamese woman they were amazing. There was a clear division between the socio-economic status of the local women and the military men they entertained. This distinction resulted in local women fawning over American soldiers. It then comes as no surprise that so-called average men from the American perspective took these selfless, admiring and exotic women home.

The major difference between brides from World War Two and Vietnam was the immersion into American society when they arrived in the United States. Soldiers from World War Two were welcomed home with honor. Yet veterans from the Vietnam War arrived home to angry protests against them and the conflict they just risked their lives fighting, especially by the late 1960s and early 1970s. With a negative reception like this for the American soldiers imagine how awkward an arrival it would be for their brides. Vietnamese women’s immersion into the American way of life was further complicated by the language barrier and lack of knowledge about the American way of life. As stated by Yuh, they were “[d]iscarding one’s culture and forsaking relationships with ethnic kin in order to cleave to the culture of a husband and serve as a housewife and mother within an American family” (Yuh, 2). These women were expected to fulfill a roll defined by a new family in a society that holds extremely different values (Yuh, 2). The attempt at
immersion was further complicated by the particular suspicions and racial stereotypes on the part of American society. American ignorance at that time when it came to race and immigrants meant women from Asian countries were seen as “mamma sans” running massage parlors or black-market businesses (Yuh). Vietnamese brides had to put in much more effort to integrate into their new country and its culture than British brides did.

The Vietnam War was unlike any other conflict due to its guerilla-style warfare, but attraction and affection for soldiers from local women was nothing new. Soldiers once again provided the avenue to a prosperous way of life in the U.S. Yet, while local people viewed them as saviors in World War Two and Vietnam, today Iraq and its people have a much different view of American troops. Ironically, the country the U.S. is purporting to be in the process of saving did not even ask for help. The U.S. presence in World War Two sparked as they responded to Pearl Harbor and Germany’s declaration of a world war. In Vietnam the U.S. was maintaining a containment policy as declared during the Cold War. Yet, unlike these two, Iraq was a stable and sovereign country. The justification for war in Iraq is dissimilar from World War Two and Vietnam. Fittingly, the relationships in the Middle East are completely novel as well. Considering Iraqi citizens don’t value the U.S. presence or any connection to the west, the war loses steam and relationships fall flat in Iraq.
Chapter 3
Lack of Love in Iraq

Since the conflict with Iraq began in March of 2003, war brides are few and far between. The current war differs significantly from World War Two and Vietnam in both the approach to the conflict and the amount of relationships. Unlike World War Two and Vietnam the U.S. is not fighting as an ally against a common enemy; instead, the U.S. launched this war on its own accord. Enemies in Iraq are a new breed with demanding tactics that force the military to take a different role in the community. As soldiers are constantly surrounded and on guard, they cannot let their guard down even to fall in love.

The American soldier’s profile has changed notably since World War Two and Vietnam. During these wars, men waited by televisions or radios with sweaty palms in anticipation of hearing their number called for the draft. The vast majority of soldiers who went to Vietnam were draftees like those from World War Two - young single men under the age of twenty. In 1975, after the Vietnam War, the U.S. military became a strictly voluntary military and since then has allowed women to serve in all areas of the military. With women now serving alongside men, marriages result in both war brides and grooms. Today, the troops in Iraq are there because they chose to fight for the United States no matter what gender. Yet, the profile for a reserve soldier in Iraq is more often an older and married man, usually with family anxiously awaiting his return home. A voluntary military leaves the U.S. with fewer troops in general. In that smaller realm a narrow population of young single men and women are left looking for relationships overseas.
Probably the largest and most detrimental factor to relationships in the Iraq War versus Vietnam and World War Two is how the American military presence is interpreted in Iraq. In the previous wars discussed, the United States is seen either as an ally or a protector. In Iraq, U.S. forces are often viewed as rude and invasive, with no respect for the local communities or their way of life. For example, there have been reports of military men raiding houses in the night and not allowing the families to properly clothe themselves before coming outside. In a Muslim country with a religion that demands conservative clothing while in public its understandable that men become outraged when their wives are thrown in the street with insufficient garb during a raid. These actions may lead to the capture of one assailant while breeding ten more. To aid the misunderstanding between the American and Iraqi culture the United States military has attempted to implement mandatory education for soldiers about the lifestyle in Iraq. However, significant biases remain on both sides. These inclinations serve as mountainous deterrents for any relationships to form, especially in the romantic realm.

One similarity among these three wars is the process of attaining parental approval. When a relationship does finally develop in Iraq, acceptance from families is hard for U.S. soldiers to reach not only due to their lack of Muslim identity, but because of their American identity as well. It’s clear how strongly citizens are discouraged from associating with Americans when they use aliases or nicknames when interviewed by journalists to protect themselves and their families. A shift in Iraqi perceptions of our troops has occurred since 2003 when the U.S. first entered the war. In that year, when the U.S. military first invaded the country, Iraqi citizens recognized the American military’s attempt to help free their country from Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship. They
provided water to American soldiers when they felt sorry for them in their layers of protective armor and long sleeve clothes in a desert country with temperatures easily reaching 100 degrees Fahrenheit (Dickey). Yet, when there was no perceivable change after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, and the U.S. military became an occupier and perceptions U.S. troops changed as well. This transition creates an even broader division between American military and Iraqi locals to bridge.

This contemporary stage for war is taking a toll on local interactions. In Vietnam there was a distinct line for the military to fall behind. While behind that line, soldiers were free to interact with the local communities. In Iraq, the war is fought on all sides and there are no uniforms to define allies from enemies. Bases remain the only constant place for interactions throughout all of these wars. Military personnel form relationships on bases where they still employ local men and women.

Such was the case for Zena Majeed and Lt. Col. Richard Allinger. The account of their romance formed in Iraq is presented in an article from *Newsweek* entitled “Love and War.” Zena was born and raised in Baghdad and has lived through the multiple wars that her country has fought. She was six when the Iran-Iraq war began and sixteen when Desert Storm took place in 1991. In 2004 she was working on her medical residency when the war in Iraq started. When the route to the hospital she worked at was blocked she took a job as an interpreter for the American forces. It was there that she met Richard Allinger, a 52-year-old geologist from Spokane, Washington. He walked in on a meeting she was interpreting and they could not forget each other (Dickey). Before a month passed, Richard proposed. “That’s the war. Everything goes fast,” according to Zena (Dickey).
Zena and Rich both worked in the five-square-mile U.S. compound known as the Green Zone that surrounds the presidential compound in the middle of Baghdad. The Green Zone is considered the safest place in the city for the American military. Many educated and bi-lingual Baghdadis work there as well. The local female workers, usually of college age, are less likely to wear scarves or veils and the men do not usually sport the traditionally long beards (Dickey). Although these Iraqi men and women may not seem as traditional, their identity with the Muslim faith is still strong within the community, leaving a large cultural gap to cross when American military personnel attempt to establish relationships with them (Dickey). Why one falls in love with someone is easy to understand, but for Americans with strong Catholic or Protestant backgrounds worshipping Allah, facing Mecca and a strongly adhering to patrimonial rules are challenging tenets to grasp. The same applies for Iraqi men and women involved with Americans. They struggle to comprehend why Americans allow girls to display so much of themselves, why there are numerous religions all believing in a different God, or why there is no connection between religion and politics. The Iraqi and American cultures share very little while holding tightly to their vastly different values. The struggle to understand each other’s culture and religious beliefs proves to be the largest obstacle to intercultural relationships in the Iraqi context.

Another romance formed on base between Leo Barajas, a contractor from Texas managing and helping with the reconstruction, and Maria Ghadeer, who lived in Baghdad. Their romance budded into an engagement with wedding plans until Maria told Leo that he would have to convert to Islam before she could marry him. Leo, a Christian, refused to bend to her wishes at first and called off the wedding. Eventually, he converted
temporarily for the ceremony (Dickey). Maria’s sister, Lena, was lucky enough to find an American soldier who was more than willing to convert to Islam before they got married (Dickey). Other couples have to find a middle ground.

An example that challenges the stereotypical relationship between war brides and military grooms is the account of MJ, a male interpreter in the Green Zone whose romance is also outlined in the article by Newsweek. He was pursued by Army Maj. Angela Barzo, who eventually proposed to him after working together. He accepted, but sadly, the two were kept apart for nearly two years while MJ waited for a visa to enter the United States. During the two years they only saw each other for 12 days in Cairo, Egypt.

Angela’s stories clearly illustrate MJ’s strong Muslim faith. At one point she called and told him that she was sun-burned from going to the beach and he became upset with her for showing her nearly bare body in front of strangers. In the Quran a women is advised to guard her modesty. The guidelines associated with what they are permitted to wear are aimed at protecting women and their moral character. The strictest rules state women are to cover themselves completely except for their hands and face; their clothing cannot be see-through and should hang loosely to hide the shape of their body. Lastly, bold colors or designs are unacceptable because all of these characteristics may cause a man to look at them with a lustful eye (Seven Conditions for Women's Dress in Islam). The point of these limitations for women is to prevent inappropriate attention. Wearing a bikini on the beach broke all of the rules MJ held for his wife’s attire according to his faith.

When discussing when they would see each other next MJ told Angela he would not hug her in public because he was a conservative man (Dickey). Somehow, love
makes one forget all restrictions just as MJ failed to suppress his physical expression for Angela at the airport as revealed by this quote: “[h]e walked through the doors and saw her, he threw his arms around her ‘I didn’t want to let her go; I just wanted to smell her’ (Dickey).” Religion remains the largest chasm to bridge between American troops and local men and women in Iraq. Americans are expected to comply with Islamic traditions if they intend on marrying an Iraqi citizen. Their religion is embedded into their everyday life as part of their law and historically-rooted culture. In the United States religion is equally important even though there is a separation of church and state mandated by the U.S. Constitution. Yet most Americans are connected to the Catholic or Protestant faiths with varying levels of adherence. While one could argue that one religion should not take precedence over the other, this seems to be the battle fought from both the bride and the groom’s side in the Iraqi context.

Religion remains a predicament in the aftermath of Angela and MJ’s marriage here in the United States. Although Angela converted to Islam for MJ, she has gone back to her own Christian traditions. She and MJ do not talk about their religious differences; they prefer to ignore them as much as possible. “We know what the differences are and where we stand” MJ explained (Dickey). One can conclude from these accounts that cultural and religious boundaries may keep couples from forming in the first place; but once the relationship is past a certain point, love and the desire to be with one another outweigh the differences between the two cultures.

Today the walls to the Green Zone are higher and stronger than ever, and the only way to go out is with a military escort or a convoy of guns on and in trucks with cover in front and behind. The lack of interaction with communities since the start of this war left
little opportunity for romances to form since the beginning of the war. State Department records reveal that after four years of fighting it's estimated a mere 2,400 visas have been granted to Iraqi spouses and fiancées' (Dickey), a meager amount compared to World War Two and Vietnam. The boundaries between American military personnel and Iraqi citizens have grown too large to overcome either socially or romantically on a large scale.

The low number of visas issued to Iraqi war brides is not going to increase either; and will instead most likely decrease. One reason is that unlike Vietnam, there are no camp towns to cultivate relationships between military men and women on a regular basis. Women in Islam do have a form of prostitution known as pleasure marriages which are approved of in their religion. The guidelines for these marriages were created for widows and other women to provide for themselves in times of despair. With plenty of Iraqi men paying for their services women are not dependant on American military resources. Nor would there be high numbers of American men going to local Iraqis considering the number of married soldiers now serving. Also, Iraqi women have opportunities Vietnamese women did not. These women live in an advanced economy with the opportunity for respectable jobs and education; plus plenty of men with good finances in their own communities. The American soldier is by no means a “meal ticket” or way out of an impoverished war-torn country.

Cultural differences were bridged and sacrificed by many British and Vietnamese women in order to achieve better lives in the United States. For British women their cultural values and religion were very similar making their sacrifices small while Vietnamese women were willing to give up whatever was necessary to get out of their war stricken country. Iraq and its people do not view the United States in the same light.
because they have access to the same resources even during this difficult time. One woman is quoted in the *Newsweek* article saying, “Different place, different traditions. I don’t have my best friends there. I like my country” (Dickey). There is a strong sense of community in Iraq encouraged by the cultural structures of the family and predominantly Islamic religion. People from the American military do not fit into this routine and without being seen as a necessity or appealing new way of life, there is not much of a drive to form relationships with them from an Iraqi perspective. This leaves raw attraction as the main contributing emotion to combine with something else to create the love leading to marriages between Iraqis and Americans. With just one reason driving all romances, and so many deterring them, one can understand why there are considerably fewer war brides being brought home from Iraq.
Conclusion

Successful Sentiment

There is not a specific yard stick to measure the success or failure in any given conflict, but looking into the amount and type of war brides brought home reflects the specific circumstances of a given war, the people involved, and their perception of U.S. military troops. There is more to war than a winner and a loser. War takes the United States to places where there is a necessity to know and understand the local people in order to truly help. Studying relationships between locals and soldiers is a great place to start the process. How, why and when relationships work is an important key to the puzzling act of war. Today troops are no longer welcomed into foreign homes for dinner as they were in Britain, and their appeal is not even that of a “meal-ticket” in Iraq. This may reveal the lack of comprehension as to what they truly need in their country.

As the context of military involvement overseas evolves relationships and romance between U.S. soldiers and foreign citizens has as well. The challenges in developing relationships abroad and in Iraq specifically today may reveal the changes in the way people around the world view American and its place in the international community. Finding both love and war, not just simply war, may provide the kind of intercultural understanding that is lacking in the present Iraqi conflict and may assist the U.S. in future battles as well.
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