

MEREDITH BROCKLEBANK

THESIS: THE GIRLS' GUN CLUB

EXEGESIS: THE PROBLEM OF THE WARRIOR WOMAN

2019

Primary supervisor: Siobhan Harvey

A thesis and exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

Centre for Creative Writing,
School of Language and Culture

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Meredith Brocklebank

EXEGESIS:

THE PROBLEM OF THE WARRIOR WOMAN

ORIGINS

In the early 2000s, several events conspired to germinate the idea for *The Girls' Gun Club*. First, my niece, who was at university, decided to join the Territorials. Remarking that she needed to be okay with killing someone, my sister burst into the room to say that the role of the army is to protect the country's borders - the full force of her five-foot stature brought to play in defence of her daughter. Aren't all soldiers taught to kill? Many of the books I read and much of the research I've carried out support this view (Benedict 2009; Harrison & Albanese 2016; Thorpe 2014). My opinion that New Zealand's border would need a navy rather than an army was rejected. I also asked who we were expecting to invade us. Australia? I was outgunned and outmanoeuvred in this encounter, but it made me ask some questions – why would a woman join the army? And what other views did New Zealand women have of the army? How did they differ from mine?

In 2003, America decided that they should invade Iraq, contrary to the wishes of the United Nations (and New Zealand), (Tunnah, 2003). After the events of 9/11, the USA invaded Afghanistan for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden. Personally, this invasion seemed highly suspect. Should New Zealand have invaded France for the Rainbow Warrior? There seemed even less justification for the USA to go into Iraq; “weapons of mass destruction” had no ties to 9/11. George Bush even stated after the invasion that he did so because God told him to (MacAskill, 2005). The Iraq war led to more questions – Why would a female NZ soldier want to deploy to one of these theatres of war?

At this time, I was a stay-at-home mum with two children under five. My weeks were spent meeting with other mothers, carting our children from day care to play dates and my weekly coffee group catch-up.

In the second chapter of *The Girls' Gun Club*, the protagonist tries out a BB gun in a gun store, which I did, although I didn't purchase the gun. This event gave me the

idea for *The Girls' Gun Club*, a group of housewives and mothers who take up shooting – and one who joins the army. The book is an exploration into why she went. By placing the key characters in upmarket Remuera as well as being mothers, I'm attempting to place them as far from army culture as possible; to discover how one would end up in a place like Afghanistan from her place of origin, Remuera.

I also came to the thesis with several preconceived beliefs about the army, particularly peacekeeping. Peacekeeping, done by the army, by men with guns, personally seemed to be an oxymoron. I expected my research would dispel the myth of New Zealand being exceptional and noble at peacekeeping. During the writing of the novel my views were changed when I attended the premiere of *Soldiers Without Guns* (Kier, Roberts, & Watson, 2019). The movie covers the peacekeeping role of New Zealand in Bougainville.

In October 1997, after peace talks at Burnham Camp, the New Zealand army deployed a “Truce Monitoring Group” called Operation Bel Isi (NZ Army, 2015). What made this peacekeeping force unique was that the army deployed with no guns. None. This exceptional decision was made by the then commander, Brigadier Roger Mortlock. He proposed that instead, the army would be deployed with guitars! (Kier et al., 2019). That any army could carry out peacekeeping duties without guns and enforce a peace that not all sides had agreed to, was incredible. Bougainville had been in a violent civil war for over ten years, with over 15,000 casualties (NZ Army, 2015). Major Ged Shirley said the decision of “being unarmed was a risk, but was seen as being one of the key factors in why Operation Bel Isi was so successful” or, as one officer put it, “carrying guns would show a lack of trust, and would defeat the purpose of monitors being in Bougainville” (NZ Army, 2015). I was shocked. Later I discovered that the peacekeeping strategies used in Bougainville were not an isolated event for the NZ Army. In East Timor, the army instigated “Operation Apito”, where the troops lived in local villages for up to a month, “sleeping in huts and working in the fields with

villagers, role modelling peaceful behaviour” (Boddy, 2002). This changed my thinking. An army that could put aside its weapons and go in with guitars, a Māori concert group and some clergy was an army that understood the meaning of peace (Kier et al., 2019). Therefore, it was important that these facts were included in the novel. I let Marie, who has an anti-army stance, be told about the New Zealand Army’s peacekeeping in Bougainville by two pro-army characters.

Another bias I brought to the work was that I am a co-owner of a duck pond on the Whangamarino River. Although unsuccessful to date, duck hunting is something I’ve actively participated in. The conservation efforts of both Fish & Game and the duck-hunting community, around the Whangamarino wetland, was an issue that I wanted to explore, and include in the novel. The conservation merits of the duck-hunting habitats are explained to the women who attend the Girls and Guns day in the novel. Like Shannon, I supported my husband to acquire a duck pond because of its conservational value. I felt it was important to convey these details to the reader. Even though it was unnecessary for the plot, it may inform readers of the positive side to duck shooting.

Putting both sides of the various arguments is deliberate in the thesis. This is aided by giving the narrator characters of different backgrounds and thinking. However, the commonality between the women is that they’re all mothers, except Andy, who is their personal trainer. The diversity of backgrounds also gives an opportunity for the thesis to have a cross-section of society, limited only by the necessity of them residing in the upmarket suburb of Remuera, Auckland.

Katherine, while initially involved in the group, abstains from involvement due to her own moral compass, which stems from her personal stance on guns and her veganism. In her stance of being anti-guns, it may be that her character will be the one that most readers will identify with. Other characters are Jane, a restaurateur, who is on a journey to discover her whakapapa, whereas Kim, the ‘fashionista’ of the group, starts

reconnecting to her religious roots near the end of the novel. Marie and Shannon are immigrants from Lebanon. The sisters have different outlooks on life, as one sister remembers where she is from, while the other is a first-generation migrant who arrived in New Zealand as an infant. I chose Lebanon as I wanted to be able to discuss certain prejudices towards Arabic people and establish the pervasive nature through the country of origin not being directly involved in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I also reflected on the migrant paths of those fleeing the Lebanese conflict (Humphrey, 1986; Hyndman-Rizik, 2008; Jureidini, 2012; Šniaukštaitė, 2014) where a large diaspora settled in Australia, New Zealand is an easy next step of migration. Furthermore, Lebanese immigration to Australia underwent radical change in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Initially, most of the Lebanese immigrants had been Christian, now they were outnumbered by the majority of immigrants being Lebanese Muslims (Humphrey, 1986; Hyndman-Rizik, 2008; Jureidini, 2012). The racism suffered by the Lebanese community in Australia is well documented (Jureidini 2012; Hyndman-Rizik 2008) which gives motivation for the family to migrate to New Zealand.

After the research into the army and its practice, I realised that I had one more task that was important for this novel. I needed to respect the dead. At the time of the novel's conception, no New Zealand soldiers had died in either Iraq or Afghanistan. Moreover, there had been no female soldiers' deaths since the Vietnam War. However, at the advent of writing this novel, 2019, there have been ten soldiers killed in Afghanistan. This included Lance Corporal Jacinda Baker, who was killed with two other soldiers in a vehicle by a roadside bomb (Theunissen, 2012). Out of respect for these particular soldiers, I changed how the character Sarah died. I would have liked to have given Sarah a posthumous medal for bravery, to give her death some more significance, some mana, however I felt that it would be disrespectful to the soldiers who had, in fact, died. Each death has its own significance and not only for the

bereaved families. At the memorial service for the three aforementioned soldiers, who died in the roadside bombing, the Governor-General stated:

“There is nothing I can say that will erase the painful grief that burns in your hearts for those whose lives were tragically cut short. What I can say is that those you lost served with great honour. They demonstrated at the highest level courage, comradeship, commitment and integrity, which are the values the New Zealand Defence Force holds as central to underpinning its ethos” (Mateparae, 2012).

Each soldier who dies in the line of duty, whether they get a medal for bravery or not, has shown the greatest courage – not only for any special actions, but also for deciding to put themselves in dangerous situations for the benefit of others. The death that I devised was developed after reading *Ashley's War* (Tzemach Lemmon, 2016, pp. 231–232), a death from the randomness of an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) which kills some, while others only a few feet away are relatively unharmed.

Inspired by the book *Big Little Lies* (Moriarty, 2014), I had intended to start the novel with Sarah's death, and have two timelines. The first timeline would follow how she died, from her introduction to BB guns as narrated in the current thesis, while secondly the other timeline would be between her death and her funeral, the book ending both lines together at the funeral. My intention was that the posthumous letter would be read as the last page of the novel, a fitting end to both the character and the writing. Alongside the double arc, each chapter started with an actual news headline from that date. In the double arc-story, this would have made sense, as the reader would immediately know from the beginning that a woman had been killed while in deployment. When I began the thesis, I believed that the work would fit within the genre of being a war novel. However, because I omitted Sarah's deployment from the novel it became clear that the genre would be women's domestic fiction. Therefore, when I changed from the single-narrative arc, the newspaper headlines became confusing for the reader, so instead they are in the timeline placed at the end of the exegesis.

Finally, the Christchurch mosque shootings of 15 March 2019 had a profound effect on the writing and narrative of this thesis. Even now, months later, the thought that a terrorist act was committed on New Zealand shores remains an unthinkable act. Personally, I was deeply affected by the attack, and questioned the relevance and appropriateness of writing a pro-gun novel at this time. I also grappled with how I could address this act in the thesis. It is because of this that the characters discuss Aramoana, previously New Zealand's most deadly shooting incident (Manatū Taonga, 2019).

Immediately after the Christchurch shootings, calls came for large-magazine guns, like those used in the mosque attack, to be banned. While public opinion was generally in favour of a law change, within the gun community there was a very different atmosphere and dialogue. I was fortunately able to engage in an informal manner, in debates with gun owners as well as non-gun owners, on how they felt. Outside actual hunting communities, guns have little relevance other than for farming purposes. For those engaged regularly in hunting, the general opinion seemed to be that 'although they didn't have or need a large magazine' they felt it would disadvantage lawful hunters, especially those who hunt for a livelihood. The debates were lively and often very heated and opinionated. I was told that we don't ban cars (or vans) if they are used to kill, like in the London Bridge and Finsbury Park killings, where vans were driven into crowds, killing eight and one respectively, injuring many others (Sky News, 2019) so therefore, it's not the fault of the gun if it kills, but of the person, or terrorist, using it. These debates ignore the fact that a gun has only one function, to kill, whereas a car (or van), is usually a passenger vehicle. Some of these debates do appear in the thesis. However, I was unable to pursue the subsequent law changes and gun buyback because of the dates and subsequent restraints of the thesis. While the last date in the novel is December 2019, it wasn't appropriate to bring up the Christchurch killings during the closing chapters.

The last scene of the novel is at the cemetery where Alex is acknowledging his mother on his wedding day, whereas the characters' arcs are resolved in the preceding three chapters. Consistent with the genre of popular women's fiction, every character needed to have a positive or resolved ending; therefore, this didn't allow for new events to be introduced.

THE PROBLEM OF THE WOMAN WARRIOR

Sarah Hall, author of *The Carbullan Army* (2008), believes that society isn't "reconciled to female warriors" and that women on the frontline, especially mothers, cause unease due to a perceived lack of maternalism (Hall, 2019). Hall, like myself, found that there are "very few female occupational fighters" in fiction, and adds "We see many depictions of 'girl power' in games, film and books where female characters have superhero status – but few realistic examples" (2019). This situation is surprising that in 2019 women in military occupations are not on the page, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu writing in 1739 states that "The military art has no mystery in it beyond others, which women cannot attain to" (1739). She certainly assumed that the debates about whether women are suitable on the front line and to appear on the page would have been concluded before now and that women's involvement in the military would be commonplace by now. For most feminists there is no reason for excluding women from the military, nor for having female warriors. The female warrior is by her actions a feminist figure, as she's stepping into the realm of the masculine, because guns are gendered objects used in gendered spaces. By having the gun trespass into the domestic, in the genre of general women's fiction, the gun becomes an agency of feminist empowerment, and is used to create a New Zealand warrior female hero¹.

¹ The word hero is used throughout to denote the difference between a heroine and hero. I am attempting to posit that a female warrior is not a heroine, a figure 'other' to a hero but a hero on the par with the male, with all the denotations, connotations, referents, symbolism and accolades that label carries. I love this quote from a misguided student in an essay at MIT "a hero is a man unless there's a reason for him to be a woman" (Huang, 2000). I think a hero can always be a woman and it's about time we read about female heroes.

GENDERED SPACES AND GENDERED OBJECTS

A major role of feminism has been to campaign for the inclusion of women in all sections of society. Women's voices omitted from history and politics and the lack of representation in places of power has been a motivating drive of the feminist movement for inclusion (L. Fisher, 1990, p. 174). Inclusion is therefore seen as positive, just as exclusion is seen as negative (p. 174). In this way, women being included in all levels of the military is seen as a victory. However, Fisher (1990) posits the idea that not all inclusions are positive, especially when the inclusion requires those now included adopt the culture and thinking of that system (p. 178). An example of this is women in the military who, rather than being able to temper the masculine and patriarchal nature of the military, are required to adapt and conform. The movie, *G.I. Jane* (Birnbaum, Moore, Scott & Todd 1997) is an example of how to be accepted by men. Jane has to adopt masculine ways and become more aggressively masculine than her fellow soldiers (1997). She shouts at her superior officer "suck my dick!" (1997), appropriating a masculine identifier, which allows her inclusion in the contested gendered military space.

Sarah, *The Girls' Gun Club* character who joins the army, challenges the male domination of the military space by choosing to enlist 'in the infantry, to further my career as a rifleman', a role that would have been unavailable prior to 2000 (Girling-Butcher, 2013). She concludes that only some male members of the army are sexist, however, 'Some of the guys are pricks, thinking the women are soft and incapable.' Here she is identifying that the military norm is gendered male and that women are the interlopers in this arena. Sarah acknowledges that the military is like other gendered spaces, 'like everywhere, you get men who think they are tough and amazing and God's gift. I ignored them, did my work and let that show them', and by her actions of being 'determined to keep up and not to be *that* women who let everybody down'. Like G.I. Jane, she appropriates male standards to be able to be accepted in the male arena.

Even the very occupation of being a soldier is gendered. A soldier is expected to be “fearless, aggressive, comradely, macho, crude, and gung-ho all at once” (Benedict, 2009, p. 141). This is how all soldiers are expected to be, male or female, but as Helen Bennet points out in *The Lonely Soldier*, (2009) “for women it is harder because the soldierly identity they have to assume is an antifemale, male-defined identity” (p. 414). This behaviour, which starts to merge into the soldier is noted by Shannon, in the thesis, as she observes the soldiers socialising: ‘Even though no-one’s in uniform, it’s easy to distinguish the military from the civilians. The military have a look about them, they stand straighter and firmer. Hold themselves differently. Shannon can’t put her finger on exactly what it is’. Later Shannon observes: ‘Sarah’s tougher. And she’s got a new air of self-assurance, and she wonders if these changes have caused Sarah to be a more closed person’. Here the attempt is to convey that the training does change a woman, and the men as well, that competing in a male gendered occupation must have consequences.

Jennifer Dawn Carson (2015) maintains that the gun range is a gendered space, “masculine terrain” where “bonds among men are forged and links between masculinity and a variety of social attributes”. The women in the thesis have a competition organised by the club so that they can test their skills against other women: ‘Jim was the one who’d encouraged the club to have a ‘ladies’ competition”, indicating that women aren’t included in Matawai club activities normally.

In these places – the military, the gun range and the gun shop, and also the gun-licence test in the thesis – men value the attributes of strength, competitiveness and courage, and women entering these places upset the values and practices (Carlson, 2015, p. 22). However, these values and practices are not exclusively male, therefore the characters Shannon and Sarah can also be competitive about their gun prowess: ‘friendly competition is the cement of their friendship’. These two characters are recognised throughout the thesis by their own admission and the other characters that they are

competitive, a traditionally male attribute. That Sarah believes she came by the attribute of competitiveness from being in a family with four older brothers does not dilute the empowerment the competitiveness brings.

While the gun range may be masculine terrain, women who contest these spaces often find themselves welcomed by men, if they are competitive – i.e. able to show a male attribute. The backstory of the character Stephanie is that she's a woman who has done exactly that, by competing at an Olympic Games competition in the men's group, one of only three women in the world to win a medal against the men. This backstory is based on Margaret Murdock and Zhang Shan who won silver and gold respectively while shooting against the men at the Olympics before it was segregated in 1992 (Shooting at the Summer Olympics, 2019). This is problematic for feminist equality in two ways; is the inclusion of women in the men's competition an act of equality or is having a women's competition an act of equality? For if women can compete on an even playing field with men, why is there a need to segregate by gender? Sarah, like Stephanie, competes against men, but in the military. By winning the Queen's Medal for the best shooter and being a member of the Army Combat Shooting Team, she proves that gender does not denote prowess, even in male gendered spaces.

Not only are these areas gendered but the gun itself is a gendered object. Its very shape lends itself to comparison with the penis, in fact priapic theory of gun ownership posits that the gun compensates for the sexual inadequacy of the male owner (McKellar, 1996, p. 70). There is also the notion that a gun symbolises male dominance and power by being a phallic object (p. 70). In the movie, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), the marines sing "This is my rifle, this is my gun [indicating their genitals], one is for shooting, the other's for fun." (Kubrick, 1987). This gendering of a soldier's gun as a phallic object, through marching songs and soldiers' behaviour with their weapons, is also seen in the biographies of women soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, (Benedict, 2009; Bragg, 2003; Thorpe, 2014; Williams & Staub, 2006). It is interesting to note that, because of the fine

sand in Iraq, soldiers would place condoms over the end of their rifles to keep the sand out (Benedict, 2009, 2011; Thorpe, 2014). Therefore, the women in *The Girls' Gun Club* need to acknowledge the gendered nature of the gun. Marie, when confronted with the air pistol, muses, 'An excuse for the boys to get together. She didn't think guns were a woman's thing', so while the women see the gendered nature of the gun, they don't openly confront it. By removing the gun from the male realm and placing it in the domestic, hegemonic masculinity is further questioned in the novel by how comfortable (or uncomfortable) the women find this.

EMPOWERMENT AND THE DOMESTIC

Bringing the gun into the domestic realm is an attempt to frame a different version of the woman warrior. There is little literature that depicts women as users of guns, and soldiers that aren't in the science-fiction realm – for example Ripley in the *Alien* series (Carroll, Giler, Hill & Scott, R, 1979; Hurd & Cameron, 1986; Carroll, Fincher, Giler, & Hill 1992; Badalato, Carroll, Giler, Hill, & Jeunet, 1997) and Sarah Connor in the *Terminator* movies (Hurd & Cameron, 1984; Cameron, 1991). Here the women have taken up guns in response to a crisis. The other device for women who take up guns in literature or movies is in response to being a victim, a way of taking back power and agency in their lives – for example *Thelma and Louise* (Gitlin & Scott, 1991) and *Set It Off* (Koules, Gray & Pollock, 1996) (Van Do, 2005, p. 339). By using victimhood as the method of introducing guns to a woman it negates the possibility that women could like guns for the same reasons as men. It confirms the societal discomfort at the idea of a woman or soldier using a gun as posited by Hall (2019). In the thesis, the women shoot because they like it, not to redress some injustice or to rob a bank.!

For *The Gun Club* women the gun becomes, rather than a symbol of the masculine, a feminist symbol of empowerment. Shannon finds that the gun gives her 'power' and makes her feel 'free. Potent. New', whereas the other women have reactions ranging from finding the idea of shooting hilarious; weird but exciting; to naughty;

unethical and bad. The range of emotions shows how the various women claim ownership of the gun or reject it, as Katherine does. For those who accept the gun and shooting, the gun is positioned as the agent of change and for at least three of the characters that change is empowering. For Shannon the gun becomes her new hobby, and then a sport that she follows, allowing her to transcend her domestic existence as a mother and find a new purpose in life. For Sarah the gun leads her to a new career, as a soldier, while for Jane the gun is a catalyst to encourage her to reconnect with her iwi. And once she connects with her lost Maori heritage the gun becomes a symbol of reconnection with her culture and a way for her to navigate in that space. J.D. Carlson states that amongst women in the USA who carry guns they are “symbols of women’s empowerment” (2015, p. 25). So, like American women carrying guns, the New Zealand women can also find the gun a tool of empowerment and make themselves into warrior women.

WHAT MAKES A HERO?

The archetype of the New Zealand hero has a genesis from the trope of the “good keen man” begun in the book of the same title by Barry Crump (2017). In Crump’s *A Good Keen Man* (2017), the protagonist is at home on the land, able to rough it and makes do – a user of Number 8 wire, another legend aligned with the New Zealand male. In *Wild Pork and Watercress*, another book from Crump, the father figure, Uncle Heck, has few words, is a great shot and his job is to look after the farm, a bushman to the core (2017, p. 334). However, how does an Uncle Heck-style character evolve into the archetype of the New Zealand hero?

The most recent New Zealander being called a hero is Willie Apiata (Little, 2012). Like Uncle Heck, Willie Apiata is a man of few words, who before joining the SAS lived a very similar life to the fictional Uncle Heck (2012, p. 51, 235). He is a New Zealand hero, a quiet, modest man, who gets on with the job in a manly way without a thought to what it may cost him. While Willie is described as having “resourcefulness,

self-reliance, personal courage, loyalty, hard work, stamina” (2012, p. 19) he is also called “the reluctant hero” (Little, 2012). Rather than see himself as a hero, Willie says he was “doing my job and just looking after my mates” (2012, p. 199). This humility is a hallmark of the quiet, modest man, who gets on with the job without making a fuss. Like Uncle Heck, Willie is at home on the land, getting the job done. So, if Willie Apiata is an ideal New Zealand male hero, styled on characters like Uncle Heck, what is the ideal female?

Crump also gives in *Wild Pork and Watercress*, a female archetype of the New Zealand woman in Auntie Bella, Uncle Heck’s wife (Crump, 2017). She cares for the child, teaches and cooks, mothering him with cakes and thoughtful touches like a hot water bottle in his bed each night (Crump, 2017, pp. 333 & 341). Willie Apiata calls his mother a hero because she “looked after all of us on her own” (Little, 2012, p. 203). In this way the mother figure is seen as a hero. Therefore, Sarah the soldier character should be kind and loving, like Auntie Bella, with the ability to cook and be a mother. Both Shannon and Sarah are cooks, who share a love of baking. Baking was Shannon’s hobby before she discovered guns, whereas the group at Sarah’s BBQ dub her a ‘domestic goddess’. The problem is Willie’s mother is a hero *because* of her domestic placement. She’s not a warrior, like the gun-carrying women of *The Girls’ Gun Club*. In the thesis, the domestic archetype is transcended, converted into a soldier, a literal warrior, who dies a hero’s death.

A hero’s sacrifice must satisfy the cultural beliefs related to heroes. Willie Apiata is a hero because he committed a brave act regardless of the danger to himself. If being a hero is defined as having courage, bravery and selflessness as well as modesty (Little, 2012, pp. 19, 166), as attributed to Willie Apiata, then these attributes needed to be found in Sarah. The drive to endow Sarah with these characteristics comes from the need for the reader to be able to identify that this character is a warrior and a hero and, most importantly, a real? woman.

In contrast to Willie Apiata, I didn't give Sarah a heroic act of courage to carry out, she doesn't pull a fellow soldier from a gun fight and save their life. What I tried to do was to give Sarah the personality of a hero, one that can be recognised like this mother who recognises Ashley White, who was killed in action in Iraq, as a hero. Here story is the subject of *Ashley's War* (2016), and where the inspiration for Sarah's demise came from. The woman approached Ashley's mother at the funeral, 'Mrs White, I brought my daughter today because I wanted her to know what a hero was,' the woman said, holding the hand of a little girl. 'And I wanted her to know girls could be heroes, too.' (Tzemach Lemmon, 2016, p. 260) The goal of the thesis was that Sarah's willingness to deploy and her reasons for doing so would endow her with the status of hero.

THE NEW ZEALAND FEMALE WARRIOR-HERO

A main question of the thesis is why Sarah deploys. This question is the reason that motivated me to begin the thesis. Why would a New Zealander, a mother and wife, with no family history of the military or exposure to guns before the novel begins and from a relatively wealthy background, do this? While there are plenty of American biographies outlining why American women deploy, there had to be some extra or other motivation for New Zealanders since we hadn't personally suffered events like the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New Zealand. The quest through the research and the writing of the novel was to find a believable reason for Sarah to deploy and, ultimately, die. Because of the genre of women's general fiction, the reason needed to be believable and understandable.

Sarah Hall posits that there is a different standard ascribed to the motivation of females going to war than males (Hall, 2019). She uses the example of girls leaving the United Kingdom to become "jihadi brides" (2019). Her contention is that the media and the government are uncomfortable with women having a "relationship with conflict" (2019). The implication is that these women have been victims of coercion, that they

have been “lured by ISIS” (Dodd, Gani & Topping, 2015). The stance of the British police is also that these women will not be prosecuted when they return (2015). This is in contrast to the reporting on male jihadis. Male jihadis are often given amusing monikers, like “Jihadi Jack” (BBC News, 2019) for Jack Letts, a British jihadi and “The bumbling jihadi” (Hurley, 2006) for Mark Taylor, a jihadi from New Zealand, making them seem ineffectual or crazy. They are also automatically considered fighters and the stance of the respective governments is not to allow them to return to their home countries (BBC News, 2019; Hurley, 2006). This positioning of women as victims without agency, while the men are seen as having complete autonomy, is problematic. Especially as all of the examples given express the same motivation for their actions, they felt it was their patriotic duty, not to their nation of origin but to Islam (BBC News, 2019; Busby & Dodd, 2019; Dodd et al., 2015; Hurley, 2006). Can women not have the same motivations as men? It is hard to believe that women are more peaceful than men and unable to take up arms for a cause. There is nothing to preclude a woman from taking up arms for a cause; women were celebrated for doing that during the Spanish civil war (Guner, 2016). That war had “mixed-gender Spanish combat battalions on the front line” (2016), well ahead of the current military debates about the front line being a suitable place for women! Violence and fighting are part of the human condition and therefore women can also be perpetrators, not always the victim. Like Sarah Hall, I want to see more female soldiers and women warriors on the pages of books, women who experience all aspects of the human condition, becoming role models and heroes (Hall, 2019). Therefore, in *The Girls’ Gun Club* I gave the characters agency for taking up arms, the same agency and motivation that is given to men.

In American biographies, the reasons female soldiers gave for deploying were wanting to defend their country after 9/11 and that they believed the work they were doing was going to help Iraqi and Afghani women (Benedict, 2009; Bragg, 2003; Rivers, 2018; Thorpe, 2014; Tzemach Lemmon, 2016; Williams & Staub, 2006). Certainly, in the

American media the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were portrayed as just because they would be freeing the women of those countries from repressive regimes. Laura Bush gave an address in November 2001 that directly positioned the conflict as a fight for the freedom from oppression for the women in Afghanistan and stated that the “fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (2001). The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was described as forcing women to “take the veil” or risk rape and death (Bush, 2001). Her speech veers very close to saying that the reason the US went into Afghanistan was to protect the women! Often the American female soldiers’ biographies say they believed they would be going to help build schools so that girls could get an education and freedom from domestic (Benedict, 2009; Bragg, 2003; Rivers, 2018; Thorpe, 2014; Tzemach Lemmon, 2016; Williams & Staub, 2006). While these reasons are also given by New Zealand soldiers (Neill, 2005), these are not the only reasons a female soldier might deploy.

Patriotic reasons to deploy in New Zealand seem to relate more to peacekeeping than the need to subdue a threat. Canada is another nation that sees itself in a peacekeeping role (D. Harrison & Albanese, 2016, p. 12), like New Zealand. Peacekeeping by New Zealand troops is often talked about in overblown ways in the media, like “Kiwi peacekeepers set the cornerstone for a nation” (Boddy, 2002) which resonates closely with Canadian writings on the war in Afghanistan. New Zealand could easily be inserted in place of Canada in this quote: “[there is] a domestic vision of Canada as a custodian of global civility... [and] the emerging role of Canadian soldier as peacekeeper” (D. Harrison & Albanese, 2016, p. 12). In the thesis I use my conversation with a Canadian in 2003 to illustrate the link between Canada and New Zealand’s thinking about peacekeeping. While we are keen to help the “bigger” nations, both countries are woefully ill-equipped to be military powers, which I illustrated by Canada needing to “canoe” to the conflict while New Zealand “hitched a lift”, which was a *Herald* newspaper headline (Taylor, 2005). In the same way the actual role of New

Zealand in Afghanistan is similar to Canada's, rather than peacekeeping New Zealand soldiers were involved in a role described as peace building.

“Peace building” (D. Harrison & Albanese, 2016, p. 14), is the practice of “counterinsurgency”, which involves an “enhanced conception of interventionism, including a greater use of force to dismantle what our allies define as a failed government” (D. Harrison & Albanese, 2016, p. 14). Hence the motivation for Sarah to deploy is a desire to be a “peacekeeper” and assist with what the allies call “winning hearts and minds” (Wibben, 2016, p. 59) however in reality deployment also involved intelligence gathering for the USA and CIA, establishing forward bases and combat activities that were exposed in investigations by Nikki Hager and *Stuff* reporters (Hager, 2011; Hager & Stephenson, 2017; Harrison, 2017). While these activities are questionable from the New Zealand public point of view – and therefore the other characters in *The Gun Club* – these would not have been problematic for the soldiers involved, as Sarah makes clear when she states that patrols are important.

While the role in Afghanistan was peacebuilding, not peacekeeping, especially not like New Zealand had done in Bougainville and East Timor, there is still a patriotic notion that peacekeeping is the ideal role for NZ troops. Historian John Crawford is quoted saying that New Zealand has a “long history of helping with UN peacekeeping” (Walters, 2018). He also states that Kiwi troops are “good at building relationships with locals,” which he believes makes them safer and more effective at the role (Walters, 2018). Certainly, this was the case in Bougainville and East Timor (Boddy, 2002; Kier, et al., 2019). Joint Forces Commander Major General Tim Gall agrees that while New Zealand ranks 99 out of the 124 nations that contribute to the United Nations peacekeeping efforts, our country is looked on to provide key leadership roles rather than numbers (Walters, 2018). In this way, the media has peacekeepers are positioned as global ambassadors for New Zealand, and by inference, that the New Zealand way is, if not better, at least efficient at peacekeeping. Since New Zealand is too small to be a

military power, therefore patriotism comes from our abilities with peace rather than war. In the thesis, Sarah is only exposed to this idea of peacekeeping being related to patriotism after she enters the army, so they are not motivations to enlist but become motivations to deploy overseas.

As Sir Jerry Mateparae said at the memorial service for Jacinda Baker and her colleagues, “principled words must often be backed by principled action. We are proud of our Kiwi tradition of standing up for what is right and for doing what is right.” (2012) These sentiments reiterate the reasons Sarah gives for deployment in her final letter, ‘I went because I had to act, I can’t look at what is happening in the world and not do my part to make it a better world’. It is also interesting to note that the former governor of Bamiyan province also views the New Zealanders’ deployment to Afghanistan in similar way. The article in which Dr Habiba Sarabi is quoted came to my attention after writing Sarah’s reasons for deployment, but the sentiment is much the same. The doctor believes that the New Zealand soldiers deployed to Bamiyan as an act of humanity, and a responsibility. Her words echo Sarah’s: “If we can see some human being in danger it is our responsibility to help those people in danger. ... If we help the human being, sometimes we are facing some sort of danger. It is part of life as a human being - to help other people” (Fisher, 2017). In this way Sarah embodies the ideal of the hero, a female warrior from a mould similar to Willie Apiata. Speaking at Waitangi, Willie Apiata describes it like this, “I journeyed into the world, to find my calling. And now I have finally come home a warrior, and a soldier, and a humble person” (Little, 2012, p. 241) Like Willie, Sarah journeys out and she acts where she sees the need, regardless of the personal cost and gives her life for her beliefs. Although she dies, she also returns home a warrior, a soldier and a hero.

An interesting autobiography that gives a different reason for deployment is *Mercenary Mum* (Joyce, 2014). She chooses to resign from the army when they refused deployment and takes a job in Iraq doing close personal security, as a mercenary (2014,

p. 77). For her, going into a war zone gave her the opportunity to put the skills she learned into practice while also providing her son with a positive role model (p. 78), which gave me the motivations for the character of Sarah. Sarah states her reasons for deployment in her posthumous letter;

I wanted to stretch myself to the maximum of what I was capable of doing. When you are a soldier, you train for combat, so I had to go... I went because I had to act, I can't look at what is happening in the world and not do my part to make it a better world. This was the only way I knew how... who would I be if I hadn't deployed? What example would it be to my boys if I stood back and did nothing?.

Here Sarah states she intends to be an example to her sons, as well as for career advancement. The letter has a third reason, about the call to do something greater than self, an altruistic motive. Sarah describes looking forward to her role in Afghanistan because she will be 'looking to seeing what I can do to help the locals', which is very similar to "there to help" (Little, 2012, p. 156), the reason Willie Apiata's SAS team gave for being in Afghanistan.

It was necessary to position Sarah with a convincing altruistic motive because of genre constraints. The reader needs to find the deployment believable, and I attempted to do so partly through the army iwi, Ngāti Tūmatauenga. A non-Maori soldier explains what it means to him, "Knowing Ngāti Tūmatauenga is my iwi gives me a sense of belonging... I am proud to say I belong to Ngāti Tūmatauenga. It gives me pride in my country, my country's history and in myself." (McKenzie, 2019). I tried to engender Sarah with this sense of belonging to a new family, but more importantly, I wanted her to personally embody the concept of "holding back the darkness"(2019). As Steve Bethell notes about the Army marae,

'Our marae faces the setting sun... Every other marae in NZ faces the rising sun to welcome the new day. If every marae faces there, who guards against the darkness? We have the back of New Zealanders during those hours of darkness... That is our sole responsibility: to protect our own. We face the darkness because that is from where the enemy will come' (McKenzie, 2019).

Sarah, likewise, sees her work on the reconstruction team in Afghanistan as guarding against the darkness, protecting the world from terrorism, insurgents and upholding the rights of non-combatant men, women and children.

The thesis is an attempt to position women in the role of a warrior hero and a soldier. While I have used the gun as the agent of feminist empowerment for these women, I am not calling women to take up arms. Rather I would like to open dialogue, pertaining to heroes, especially New Zealand ones, to suggest that women can be heroes, with the same motivations as men.

REFERENCES

- Badalato, B., Carroll, G., Giler, D., Hill, W. (Producers), & Jeunet, J.-P. (Director). (1997). *Alien Resurrection*. [Motion picture]. United States: Twentieth Century Fox.
- BBC News. (2019, June 21). Jack Letts, Islamic State recruit: 'I was enemy of UK'. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com>
- Benedict, H. (2009). *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq*. Boston, MA, United States: Beacon Press.
- Birnbaum, R., Moore, D & Todd, S. (Producers) & Scott, R. (Producer & Director). (1997). *G.I. Jane*. [Motion picture]. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.
- Boddy, R. (2002, November 15). Kiwi Peacekeepers Set the Cornerstone for a Nation. *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz>
- Bragg, R. (2003). *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*. New York, NY, United States: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Busby, M. & Dodd, V. (2019, February 14). London Schoolgirl who fled to join Isis wants to return to UK. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Bush, L. (2001). Radio Address by Mrs Laura W. Bush, Crawford, TX, November 17, 2001. [Radio address transcript]. Retrieved from <http://www.bushcenter.org>
- Cameron, J. (Producer, Writer, Director). (1991). *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar Films.
- Carlson, J. D. (2015). Carrying Guns, Contesting Gender. *Contexts*, 14(1), 20–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504214567850>
- Carroll, G., Giler, D. & Hill, W. (Producers) & Fincher, D. (Director). (1992). *Aliens 3*. [Motion picture]. United States: Twentieth Century Fox.
- Carroll, G., Giler, D. & Hill, W. (Producers) & Scott, R. (Director). (1979). *Alien*. [Motion picture]. United States: Twentieth Century Fox.

- Crump, B. (2017). *Wild Pork and Watercress*. In *Barry Crump Collected Stories*. Nelson, New Zealand: Potton & Burton.
- Dodd, V., Topping, A. & Gani, A. (2015, October 3). Missing girls lured by Isis won't face terrorism charges, says Met chief. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Fisher, D. (2017, March 28). 10 years, eight lives and \$300m in Bamiyan—Was New Zealand's time in Afghanistan worth it? *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz>
- Fisher, L. (1990). Feminist Theory and the Politics of Inclusion. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 21(2–3), 174–183. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1990.tb00289.x>
- Girling-Butcher, L. (2013, January 26). NZ among first to put women in front line. *Taranaki Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://www.stuff.co.nz>
- Gitlin, M. P. (Producer) & Scott, R. (Producer & Director) (1991). *Thelma and Louise*. [Motion picture]. United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
- Guner, F. (2016, July 20). Felicia Browne: The only known British woman to die in the Spanish civil war. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Hager, N. (2011). *Other People's Wars: New Zealand in Afghanistan, Iraq and the War on Terror*. Nelson, New Zealand: Craig Potton Publishing.
- Hager, N. & Stephenson, J. (2017). *Hit & Run: The New Zealand SAS in Afghanistan and the Meaning of Honour*. Nelson, New Zealand: Potton & Burton.
- Hall, S. (2008). *The Carhullan Army*. London, England: Faber & Faber.
- . (2019, August 3). Women at war: Why do we still struggle with the idea of female soldiers? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Harrison, C. (2017, August 21). Stuff Circuit: Meet the investigators behind The Valley. *Stuff*. Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz>

- Harrison, D. & Albanese, P. (2016). *Growing up in Armyville: Canada's Military Families During the Afghanistan Mission*. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Huang, T. (2000). Essay 8. *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*. Retrieved from <http://web.mit.edu/cultureshock/fa2000/essay8.html>
- Humphrey, M. (1986). The Lebanese war and Lebanese immigrant cultures: A comparative study of Lebanese in Australia and Uruguay. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 9(4), 445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1986.9993545>
- Hurd, G. A. (Producer) & Cameron, J. (Writer, Director). (1984). *The Terminator* [Motion picture]. United States: Orion Pictures.
- . (1986). *Aliens*. [Motion picture]. United States: Twentieth Century Fox.
- Hurley, B. (2006, December 18). The jihadi and me: Conversations with 'bumbling' Kiwi jihadi Mark John Taylor. *Stuff*. Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz>
- Hyndman-Rizik, N. (2008). 'Shrinking Worlds': Cronulla, Anti-Lebanese Racism and Return Visits in the Sydney Hadchiti Lebanese Community. *Anthropological Forum*, 18(1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664670701858968>
- Joyce, N. (2014). *Mercenary Mum: My Journey from Young Mother to Baghdad Bodyguard*. Melbourne, Australia: Nero.
- Jureidini, R. (2012). On Being Lebanese in Australia: Identity, racism and the ethnic field. *Race & Class*, 53(4), 100–102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396811425995>
- Kier, J., Roberts, C. (Producers) & Watson, W. (Producer & Director) (2019). *Soldiers Without Guns, An Untold Story of Unsung Kiwi Heroes*. [Motion picture]. Auckland, New Zealand: TMI Pictures.
- Koules, O. & Pollock, D. (Producers) & Gray, F. G. (Director) (1996). *Set It Off*. [Motion picture]. United States: Roadshow Entertainment.
- Kubrick, S. (Producer, Writer, Director). (1987). *Full Metal Jacket*. [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

- Little, P. (2012). *Willie Apiata, VC: The Reluctant Hero*. Auckland, New Zealand: Viking.
- MacAskill, E. (2005, July 10). George Bush: “God Told Me to End the Tyranny in Iraq?”. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Manatū Taonga. (2019). David Gray kills 13 at Aramoana. *NZ History*. Retrieved from: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz>
- Mateparae, J. (2012). Military Commemorative Service Speech. Retrieved from <https://gg.govt.nz>
- McKellar, S. (1996). Guns: The ‘last frontier on the road to equality’? In P. Kirkham (Ed.), *The Gendered Object*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press
- McKenzie, P. (2019, January 15). How the NZ Army became an iwi. *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsroom.co.nz>
- Moriarty, L. (2014). *Big Little Lies*. Sydney, Australia: Pan Macmillan.
- Neill, C. C. (2005, March). NZDF women speak in Afghanistan. *Army News*, 330, 11. Retrieved from Waiouru Army Museum.
- NZ Army. (2015). Bougainville: 1990 - 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.army.mil.nz>
- Rivers, E. (2018). *Beyond the call: Three women on the front lines in Afghanistan*. New York, NY, United States: Da Capo Press.
- Shooting at the Summer Olympics. (2019). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_at_the_Summer_Olympics
- Sky News. (2019, November 10). Terror in the UK: Timeline of attacks. *Sky*. Retrieved from <https://news.sky.com>
- Šniaukštaitė, E. (2014). Libaniečių diasporos kelias. *The Paths of the Lebanese Diaspora*, (17), 101–112. Abstract retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12259/32561>
- Taylor, K. (2005, February 6). SAS hitch ride on US planes. *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz>

- Theunissen, Matthew. (2012, May 8). NZ Soldiers Killed in Afghanistan. *NZ Herald*.
Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz>
- Thorpe, H. (2014). *Soldier Girls: The Battles of Three Women at Home and at War*. New York, NY, United States: Scribner.
- Tunnah, H. (2003, January 7). US Rejects NZ Concerns over War with Iraq. *NZ Herald*.
Retrieved from National Library of New Zealand.
- Tzemach Lemmon, G. (2016). *Ashley's War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Van Do, P. (2005). Gurlz N Guns: Popular and Firearm Culture in Contemporary America. *Discourse of Sociological Practice* 7, 1: 329–345. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Walters, L. (2018, April 6). NZ's changing attitude to UN peacekeeping missions. *Stuff*.
Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz>
- Wibben, A. T. R. (2016). Female Engagement Teams in Afghanistan: Exploring the 'War on Terror' narrative. In Wibben, A. T. R. (Ed.), *Researching War: Feminist Methods, Ethics and Politics*. Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Williams, K., Staub, M. E. (2006). *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army*. London, England: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Wortley Montagu, L. M., & Fermor, L. S. (1739). *Woman not Inferior to Man: Or a Short and Modest Vindication of the Natural Right of the Fair-Sex to a Perfect Equality of Power, Dignity and Esteem with the Men*. London, England: John Hawkins at the Falcon in St. Pauls's Church-Yard. Retrieved from <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk>